#58
Sept.
2012

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Surprising Comics

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THE DRIVING FORCE

By Ian Shires

Welcome to our September issue! We have a slew of articles and features this month, which has truly exceeded my hopes for what we'd be able to put out this quickly. It is quite heartening that people are starting to latch onto the basic idea of what we're trying to do here. Perhaps it bears a bit more exposition for clarity's sake. *SP! Magazine* is very much meant to be a "for the people, by the people, and about the people" thing. I'm not charging for ads right now, because I don't think we have enough readers to do so, yet. I am thinking 1000 downloads before I start charging for full pages. I also intend to always keep SOME form of free advertising available, no matter what.

What of the $$ when we do start charging? It is my intention to build a staff here that will have a say in what we spend the $$ on. It is not my desire to dictate everything about this zine. I have an idea that we will print editions of the mag targeting giveaway events at comic shows. Another idea would be using some ad $$ to start a fund and give out grants each year. But these are just my ideas, and I want to mix them with those of others who are working on this magazine, having the staff vote on decisions each step of the way.

I've praised Jay Savage a couple times for being instrumental in my deciding to go ahead and start this all up again, when I had really given up. Well, I've continued to talk to Jay, and we have started some discussions which we hope to see lead to the re-forming of *SPA Comics*, and the re-launching of the Anthology, among other aspects of his helping to make the SPA what it is starting to become again.

I'm fairly confident that Jay will be on board for such a staff of directors. The question is, who else? Frankly, I'm not sure. I don't know who will step forward to fill needs we're starting to identify. Needs like having a marketing director for the mag. And an art director, so we can start making prettier pages ('cause let's face it, I'm not the best page designer) and whatever else we can figure out that would benefit us all, as we move forward.

There are obviously a lot of factors and aspects to be considered, and we're flying by the seat of our pants right now, with no budget—just ideals to guide us. But meanwhile, on our way, we are going to have fun—so, we have that going for us, at least. In fact, that's why many of us got into comics to begin with, so, wherever this all leads us, whether we reach the goals we're hoping to or not, it's going to be worth it all the way to keep trying.

I think I'll leave the discovery of what this issue has to offer to your own reading of the Contents and Credits. Let's look forward a bit, instead. Next issue is set for release in October, so we have a few of our writers working on Halloween-themed articles. We're not going to totally horror-out though, and we have a cover feature planned on Small Press Idol alumni Sky Pirates, who have a new release coming. Hopefully, I will also be able to get more reviews done myself for next issue; I didn't really get much time, this month—although we did manage to introduce two new reviewers, this outing. So... Let's read!!!

CREDITS

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Surprising Comics' Mark F. Davis

An Interview by John Helmer

Mark F Davis is a man with many hats: Writer, editor, publisher, and certainly art director for Surprising Comics. With an experience base in the industry that ranges from comic book store owner to general fan, Mark has been able to craft incredible tales with rich and vibrant characters. Currently publishing *All Surprising Comics*, he has been able to develop new talents and also worked with some veteran creators for his signature books and characters. Mr. Davis was gracious to sit down with *SP! Magazine* to discuss his career in comics and the direction in which *Surprising Comics* is headed as a company…

SP!: Mark, tell the readers about yourself.

MFD: I'm blessed to have two fine sons, ages 24 and 22. I live in Phoenix, AZ. It's hot here.

SP!: How long have you been publishing comic books?

MFD: *Surprising Comics* sent our first comic to the printer a little over two and a half years ago.

SP!: Describe what it's like to make a Surprising Comic.

MFD: Most of the comics I publish have 20 interior pages. Usually, they are comprised of two or three short stories. Since I have a number of comic book creators working to make the comics, I plan what type of stories I'm looking for in a particular issue, and then plug in story lengths, creators, and so on. Once I have a script, I send it along to the artist, along with any specific instructions or insights. When the artist turns the art in, which is done via a file by email, I forward the art and script along to the letterer. Again, this is all done via email. As an aside, I've never actually touched a page of original art for a *Surprising* comic book, other than when a talented and generous artist named Stuart Berryhill decided I should own the original cover to my first comic book and sent me the cover to *Surprising Theater #1* for my personal collection for no charge. He even covered the shipping. It was a great gift. Owning that piece is definitely one of my personal highlights since starting *Surprising Comics*.

Anyway, back to the process of making a comic book. The letterer then sends the finished pages back to me to proof. Once I approve the final art and lettering, my file guy sends the comic book off to the printer. It takes a village to make a *Surprising Comic*.

SP!: Tell us about the Surprising Comics universe!

MFD: Our main superheroes that we're focusing on right now are Skyscraper, The American Guard, and Depthon of the Deep. There are plenty more good guys and gals where those came from, some who have seen print, and some who have not been in one of our stories yet. We've got several villains developed, with one main villain, Downfall—who was mentioned in *Surprising Theater* #4, but hasn't appeared yet in one of our comic books. The one thing I can tell you about Downfall, he's going to actually be the villain that succeeds where all other villains have failed. He's going to conquer the Surprising Comics world. Just a small tidbit about Downfall there. (Laughs)

SP!: Which writer has influenced

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your writing/stories most?
MFD: Legendary Lloyd Smith. Lloyd had a small press publishing company in the nineties, Blue Moon Comics Group. Armed with his writing talent and an arm ful of enthusiasm, Lloyd published a great many cool comics. In fact, he had an entire line of comics, covering several different genres. I studied what Lloyd did, and he moved me along the learning curve of publishing. Truly, Lloyd showed me this could be done, and what Lloyd did at Blue Moon remains my inspiration for Surprising Comics.

SP!: You started with LandMark Comics. Can you tell us a little about that company?
MFD: LandMark Comics was the forerunner of my current comic book publishing company, Surprising Comics. I made tons of mistakes, but slowly moved along the learning curve on how to publish comics. After lots of time and effort, I believe LandMark Comics got out three ash cans and one full size comic book.

SP!: Next, you formed Surprising Comics. What are its origins?
MFD: Surprising Comics actually had a couple misfires, but I kept trying to get up and running as a comic book publisher. I was determined to at least get further along than I had with LandMark. I had one reliable artist, Randy Valiente, but despite not knowing the specifics of how, I felt I could make it. Then, I got my first big break. The incredibly talented George E. Warner agreed to letter for Surprising Comics and do production and design work for us. After adding this major building block, things began to pop for me like corn kernels in a microwave, as artists and writers began to join in and work for Surprising. Later, the prolific and talented T. Warren Montgomery stepped in and helped fill the role of letterer and designer. A list of his pro credits would likely be as long as a football field. In the past he's inked, as well as lettered and designed, and currently he's doing a lot of work for Bluewater Productions, as well as other publishers. His friend, the very talented Ron Stewart, has drawn several stories for Surprising Comics, as well as a couple covers. He's definitely one of the most talented artists I've worked with. Kenneth M. Johnston is an all-around talent, capable of doing outstanding writing, artwork and lettering. He also created a villain, who has tangled with several of our heroes in two different issues. Look for more artwork from Ken in our comics in the future. I'm hoping to get more writing from him, as well. Anyway, I guess my point is, once you prove you're serious about publishing, other creators want to get involved and I've been blessed to have some of the best work with me at Surprising Comics.

SP!: Talk about your titles.
MFD: As I mentioned, *Surprising Theater* is an ongoing anthology. I also have launched a second ongoing title, *All Surprising Comics*, which focuses only on the Surprising Comics universe.

SP!: What is the Surprising Comics business model like?
MFD: Until the last ten or twelve years, I never would've tried to launch Surprising Comics. There are several reasons for that. First and foremost, with the advent of print-to-order comic book printers, it's made it possible for a smaller comic book publisher without an abundance of capital to survive. To that end, I've released seven comic books so far, with two more nearing completion. Specifically, I've been using Ka-Blam Digital Printing, for the most part. They have a great selection of indie comics for sale at their retail site IndyPlanet.com. Mine are there, and when someone buys a comic book from them the publisher gets a cut of the sale without ever having to put any monies out on printing that issue. Of course, my comics are also available through surprisingcomics.com.

Another point that speaks to the timing of launching a smaller comic book publishing company in this day and age, I knew going into this that I could likely meet creators easier than in the pre-internet days, and that has proven very true. Essentially, I can run Surprising Comics from my computer.

SP!: What is your writing process like?
MFD: I'm an old school guy. I have a bunch of notebooks I write my stories

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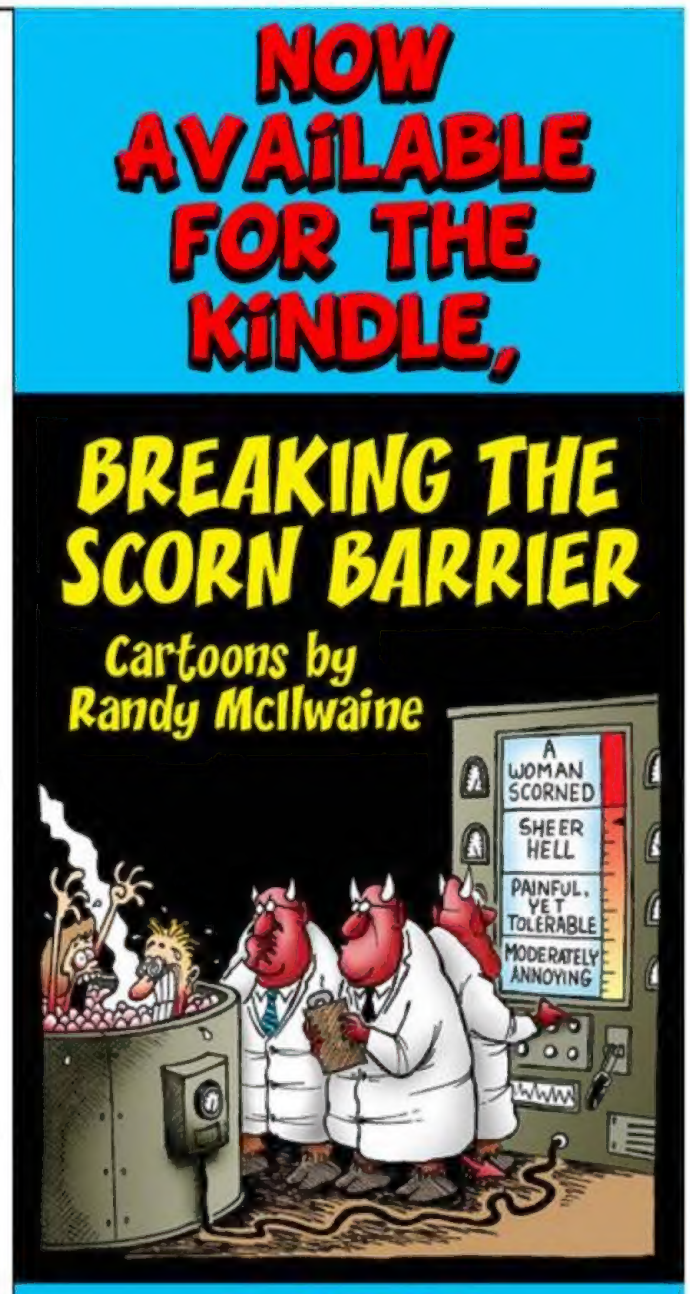

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in with an ink pen. My method is a mix of techniques. Sometimes I work off a plot, sometimes I just write. If I think of a scene or event, I'll write it, and then figure out where to work it in.

SP!: Is it easy for you to create a new character?
MFD: It's hard work, but I've been fortunate to have created a good number of characters. Sometimes I come up with the entire concept for the character, other times, they evolve as I'm writing. I've just tweaked one of my villains, Laughingstock, when I was writing a superhero story. I had a guy committing crimes and riding a motorcycle to get away. As I worked on the story, I realized it was Laughingstock doing that. So, both writing and creating characters can be an evolutionary process.

SP!: The late great Steve Perry wrote for Surprising Comics. What was that experience like?
MFD: It ended up being bittersweet. I'm a huge fan of Marvel's New Universe, and Steve had written a few New Universe issues. I stumbled upon an autographed copy of one of those issues he had written and was selling on eBay, and I purchased it. That's actually how I "met" Steve. We went on to form a friendship, and he scripted a sci-fi story for *Surprising Theater* #4. Sadly, it turned out to be the last story Steve would write, as he passed away shortly after turning in the script. He was actually going to draw the story too. That would've been awesome.

SP!: And now, the legendary Silver Age writer Steve Skeates has written stories for one of your marquee characters, Depthon. What was that experience like?
MFD: Steve has been unbelievable to work with. He's one of the most prolific writers in comic book history, and is coming off winning the Bill Finger Award at the 2012 San Diego Comicon for Excellence in Comic Book Writing. He's one of the greatest guys I've ever worked with. He had a historic run scripting *Aquaman* at DC Comics, writing *Sub-Mariner* for Marvel Comics, and writing *Undersea Agent* for Tower Comics, so I knew there was no one who could possibly match his ability to write *Depthon of the Deep* for Surprising. He wrote three Depthon stories for me, the first of which was published in *All Surprising Comics* #1, the other two will follow suit and see the light of day in that title as well.

SP!: Will Steve have further stories at Surprising Comics?
MFD: I certainly hope so. We're both open to that possibility. It's just going to depend on how things unfold at Surprising Comics.

SP!: What can readers expect in the future from your company?
MFD: I started Surprising Comics with the belief that there must be a lot of very talented comic creators out there, who never had gotten the chance to have their work published and would jump at the chance to see their work in print. I must say that theory of mine proved to be correct. I hope to continue to uncover undiscovered talent to work for Surprising Comics, and continue mix in comic book professionals, like we did with Steve Perry, Steve Skeates, George E. Warner, and T. Warren

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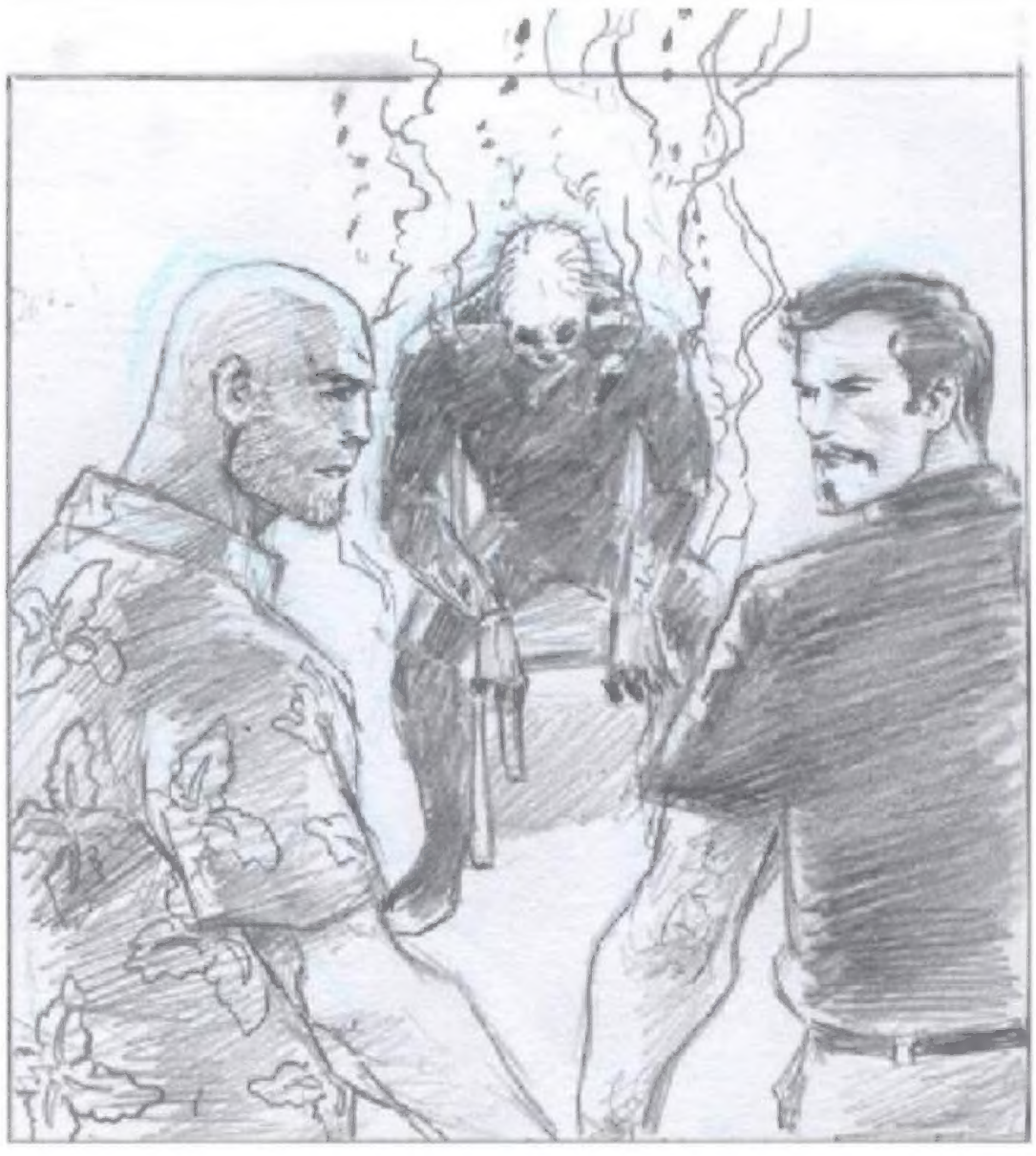

MIKE SALT AND AAN BUDI SULISTYO

COME HELL OR HIGH WATER

"REAL VAMPIRES DON'T SPARKLE"

EVIL MOOSE PUBLISHING

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Montgomery. We'll keep *Surprising Theater* going, along with *All Surprising Comics*. I really want to focus on developing the Surprising Comics universe, so watch for our superhero universe to unfold over the next several years. Expect to see Surprising superheroes Skyscraper, The American Guard and Depthon, along with so many others, and Surprising villains like Downfall and Laughingstock in the future!

SP!: Thanks for doing this interview, Mark!
MFD: The pleasure is all mine, John. Thank you!

For all the Latest going on at Surprising Comics, visit: surprisingcomics.com

Forging Their Own Destiny

An Interview with the Creators of *Destiny's Fate*

By Ellen Fleischer

Destiny's Fate is a self-published mini-series that asks, "What choices do we make in our lives, or are all decisions controlled by a force unbeknownst to us?" KAINOA RYDER is DESTINY, the physical manifestation of a future created by choice, unlike FATE, a future based upon a predetermined outcome. The story chronicles the struggle of Kainoa, a time-traveling assassin who returns home after seven years to fulfill his fate—to kill the defenders of time. His parents. SP! caught up with writer Devin Michaels and artist Mauricio "Mau" Vargas-Martinez earlier this month to ask them a few questions:

SP!: Let's start with the basics. How did you all get together?
Mau: Dev kind of stalked me.
Devin: (laughing) I did not! I saw him on Tumblr. He had a great picture of Superboy, and his prices were competitive. So I asked for a few pictures of Dick Grayson [Nightwing], actually, and then he did covers for my Web-script, *False Dawn.*
Mau: Or so she says!
Devin: It's hard to stalk from Jersey! Anyway, when I wanted to do a comic, there was no one else I would pick. Rodrigo, our colorist, is a friend of Mau's, so we added him. And then, we met Taylor on Twitter, actually. He's a former member of the Marvel Bullpen, and when Mau and I were talking, he asked if he could letter. So I snatched him, too.

SP!: I see. Can you tell me a bit about False Dawn?
Devin: FD was literally a story I wrote for my website in comic script form. It wasn't published. Mau only did covers. Essentially, it was a story about a fourteen-year-old mortal who struggled to find his kidnapped, mortal mother and uncle, and (with a little help from a cursed immortal and a were-phoenix) survive the dangers of two worlds that live parallel to ours.

SP!: Whoa! Okay. And what are your backgrounds? How long have you been involved with comics in some way, shape or form?
Devin: Um...me? Seventeen years. My first comic was *Adventures of Batman and Robin #1.* I was an intern at DC Comics in the Advertising and Custom Publishing Department in 2007.
Mau: I became a comic book artist around year 2000. I used to draw adult comics for a small press, here in Mexico. Since then, I've been doing artwork here and there.

SP!: Any titles make it north of the border?
Mau: Not really, but I've worked for

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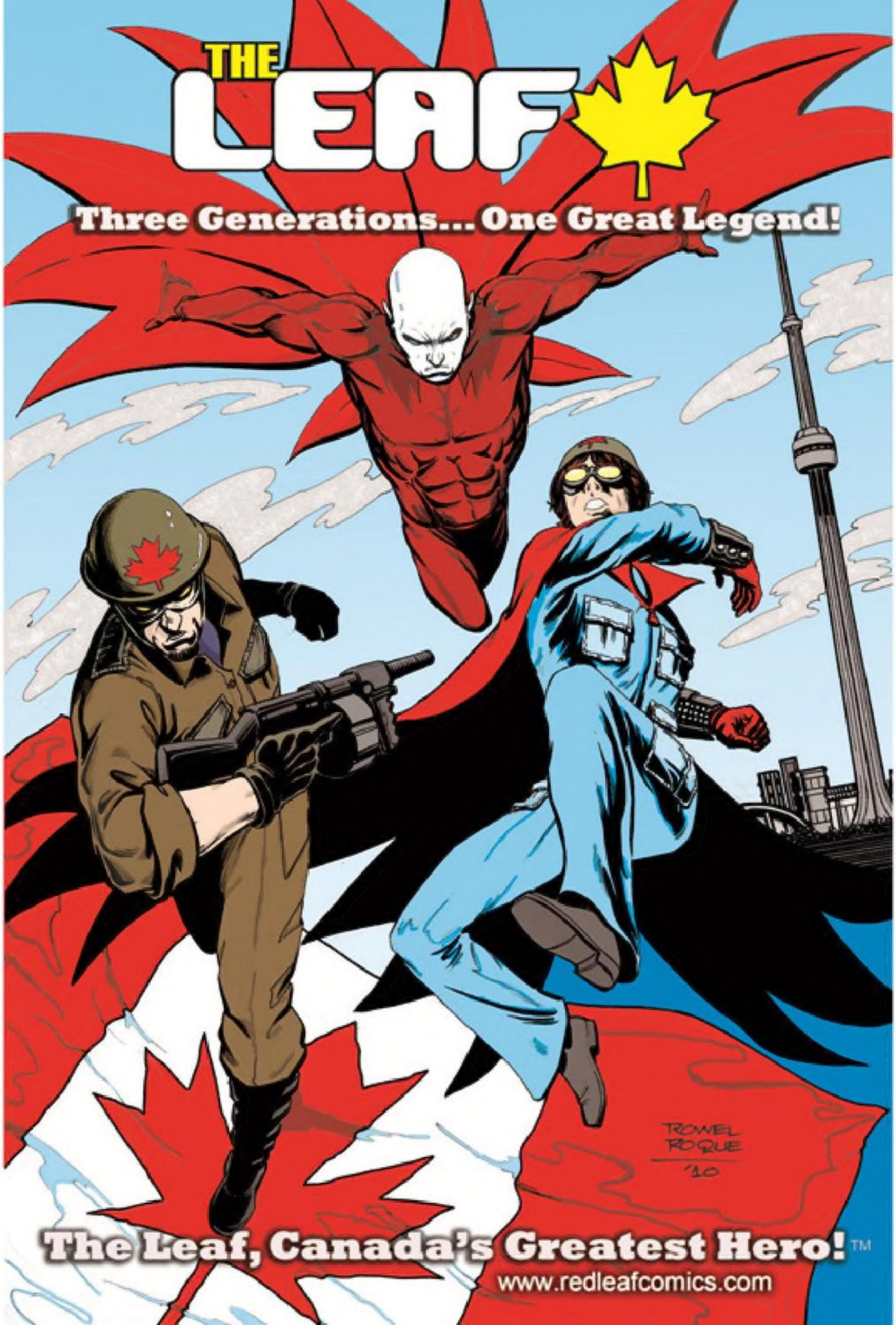
THE LEAF

Three Generations... One Great Legend!



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advertising and several commercial directors so...
Devin: Coca-Cola! Milky Way!
Mau: No, nothing printed, until now. What I did for Coca-Cola and Milky Way was storyboards and concept art—it was for internal company use, not general release.

SP!: Cool! And Devin, from your internship, did you pick up any skills that are coming into play now?
Devin: I did a lot of desk work, spreadsheets, and filing, but it really helped to teach me how to focus on a project and see it through. Also, it be about to focus on a project sometimes for eight or more hours. For Kickstarter and even just publicity for a book, one needs to be very organized. I have to know who I solicited to, who retweeted, thank them accordingly and follow up if need be. Same with working with awesome artists and letters. As writer, I have to make sure my work is done, so they can work. And then I have to make cookies to keep my artist happy. :)
Mau: So... You kind of stalk people.
Devin: Oh, my God!
Mau: Just joking!

SP!: How did you get the idea for Destiny's Fate?
Devin: I originally wrote DF as a novel as a final project for a college class called "Senior Project 401." I wanted to do a time traveling story. I really liked the idea of a force preventing people from changing time. That was the Defenders in the book.
From there, I researched time, destiny, and fate, and the story grew from there. I took a lot of Japanese courses in college, because I love manga and anime, so that's how Kainoa became Japanese-American.

SP!: Was Senior Project 101 a creative writing class?
Devin: I was a communications major with a concentration in writing, so there were at different times--fiction, nonfiction, journalism in the class. My forte was creative writing, so I chose that aspect.

SP!: I read the blurb on Kickstarter, but I'm still a little bit unclear on the difference between "Destiny" and "Fate." They're often used interchangeably in regular conversation.
Devin: Destiny is an achieved future. It's something you work toward, work hard to attain. I worked at being a writer. Fate is a predestined future—something that's going to happen no matter what. It can't be changed. So if we were to take the same scenario... I HAD to become a writer. There was no changing that.
That's the problem in the story. Kainoa wants to change something that he can't change, and it's frustrating because he's the physical manifestation of Destiny.

SP!: So... our doing this interview? Fate or destiny?
Devin: I'm going to say fate, LOL. Even though we worked hard to achieve this, I don't want to believe this couldn't have happened.
Mau: A bit of both, I mean, you're gonna make us famous and stuff!

SP!: Amen! What can you tell me about Kainoa and his background? What drives him?
Devin: Kaino's driven by anger and inner turmoil. He was kidnapped when he was seven by his grandfather and forced to become an assassin. His parents protect all of time.

SP!: Ah! So... Normal, doting family.
Devin: Hee! Kind of. His parents are protectors of time. Why couldn't they have gone back and time and saved him? Why didn't they? And now he's forced back to living with them in hopes of infiltrating the Defenders' HQ and after all this time, he has to face reality. What really happened seven years ago when he was kidnapped. Did his parents not want him? And why did Lysander take him--what's the REAL reason.

SP!: What exactly does it mean to "protect all of time's events"?
Devin: The Defenders protect all the events in time that are Fated. So if someone was supposed to happen, like Lincoln's assassination, then they make sure it does. They know if something wasn't supposed to happen through research (history department) and the effect of the change. If someone changes history, so Lincoln lives, but the U.S. is utterly destroyed in the process, then the Defenders know Lincoln should have died. Harsh people...

SP!: Now, on the subject of the artwork, I'm getting a distinct Manga vibe. Is that your regular style, or was it something you felt the story needed?
Mau: I am more influenced by animation. I'm not a big fan of Manga and anime, but there are some elements of it that I like.

SP!: Who (or what) would you say are the major influences on your art?
Mau: I am going to go with Disney and old Looney Tunes cartoons. I love animation, but I also love comic book art a lot, and there are a lot of talented people out there. So many that I can't really name them all. I look for inspiration everywhere I can, not only in graphics. I look for something that gets me in the mood to draw and helps me into a kind of rhythm.

SP!: What kind of references do you use for your artwork?
Mau: I like photos, but lately, I've been trying not to look to my favorite comics while drawing. I try to base my drawings in reality as much as I can.

SP!: Who came up with the character designs for Destiny's Fate?
Mau: When I got on board, Dev had a clear design in her mind. She's like the character's mother, and I'm more like the drunken uncle, LOL. I'm trying my best to bring these ideas in Dev's mind

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This is not redemption. This is Revelations.

http://www.facebook.com/hereafte.press.revelationsr
http://www.wix.com/loucien/revelations

http://hereafterpress.ecrater.com/

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to life. Does that make sense?
SP!: It does!
Mau: It's kind of a translation from words to images.

SP!: How about on the writing end? Devin, what would you say your major influences and inspirations have been for Destiny's Fate? Literary, artistic, or otherwise.
Devin: Major influences were definitely writers like Ed Brubaker, Chuck Dixon, Geoff Johns, and fantasy-wise Curt Benjamin. But my love of writing itself comes from my mom. She's an English teacher. :)

SP!: Is it too soon to ask what's next on the horizon? Are you already thinking sequel? Or is there some other project in the offing?
Devin: *Destiny's Fate* the miniseries is actually the first arc of DF. The novel I wrote was twenty chapters long, so to do the whole first book would be about 25-30 issues, which—since DF is a a creator-owned comic—isn't something I can do at the moment.
We did submit to Image in hope of being picked up, and if the editors felt it worthwhile, we'd do the whole thing. Meanwhile, we're going with Kickstarter. And we're just about to finish up issue #2!
Mau: Only time will tell.

SP!: Anything you'd like to add that we haven't touched on yet?
Devin: The team we have is really amazing. Mau, Rodrigo, and Taylor are professional, hard-working, and bring the script to life. I really enjoy working with them. Actually, it's awesome working in comics. The community itself is awesome, and our project has been backed by James Tynion IV (who currently writes the back-up story to Batman) and Joey Esposito (no relation to Taylor and editor of IGN). We also have been retweeted by such talent as Kyle Higgins, Gail Simone, Mikel Janin, Marcus To, and Joe Caramagna
Mau: Well, we are the next big thing and the book is awesome and you should get it! Oh. And what Dev says, too.
Devin: It's ICG's first title, but it's still creator-owned, so... we don't get paid unless it sells. I guess that's about it. Oh, and what Mau says!

SP!: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today! All the best!
Destiny's Fate is being distributed by IC Geeks Publishing, POD. To contribute to their Kickstarter campaign, please visit http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1986429142/destinys-fate-issues-1-and-2?ref=live before Thursday, September 6th at 8:57 PM EDT.

David Sandoval

An Interview by John Helmer

David Sandoval's writing career spans comic books and other genres. He's worked in the film industry, crafting scripts and developing projects. He stopped by *SP!Magazine* to talk about his writing career and share his thoughts on the industry.

SP!: Where were you born and raised?
DAVID: I was born in Burlington, CO, but was raised in south Texas. A small town named Alamo.

SP!: Tell SP!Magazine about yourself…
DAVID: I'm 32, a Texan without the accent, I have a film degree in media arts and screen writing. I went back to school to continue my education and am working on a double major in business and philosophy. I love to write and am now a big fan of reading novels. Been collecting comics since I was about nine years old; my favorite artist is Jim Lee, and I have about four long comic boxes full of just his stuff. Started N.A.S Studios in October of 2011, and loving every minute of it, since then.

SP!: Have you had any formal training in writing?
DAVID: I actually took a ton of writing courses in college, and when I went to film school focused on screenwriting. Funny thing is I'm back in school and working on a second degree in business and philosophy.

SP!: Who are your writing influences?
DAVID: There're actually a few I really enjoy and think I get a lot of influence from. Anne Rice, Sean Williams, Robert E. Howard, Drew Karpyshyn, Greg Pak and Ed Brubaker

SP!: How did you break into writing comic books?
DAVID: After I'd worked in the film industry for a few years, I realized that most of the screenplays I was writing would look awesome as comics. I started writing with a friend of mine, but soon realized if I was going to do this, I had to get serious and really leave all the doubts I'd had in the past, behind me. I started a few projects, but most of the people were more doing it as a hobby, so nothing was really getting done. I ventured out on

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my own and met a few people that really gave me that push. Andrew Mangum (DC, Image, Zenescope), who has now become a good friend of mine, really gave me a crash course on everything I needed to do. Since then, I have had the opportunity to work with not only Andrew, but other artists, like Patrick Blaine (DC, Top Cow, Dark Horse), Ale Garza (Marvel, Image, Dynamite), and the late Al Rio (Marvel, DC, Zenescope).

SP!: What is the first comic you remember reading?
DAVID: *The Amazing Spider-Man #338 Vol. 1 / The Return of the Sinister Six: Part 5.*
Which I still have, by the way, and it's signed by Erik Larsen as well. LOL

SP!: Do you read any of the new comic books that are being published today?
DAVID: I do. I recently started with the new volume on *Hulk*. But I'm so behind on everything that I try to stay on one series till I catch up, then jump to the next. I honestly wish I had more time to read, but I'm so busy nowadays. Next up, The New 52 *Justice League*.

SP!: Print versus digital. Your thoughts?
DAVID: I'm a fan of print. For those of us who collect, there will be that one day out of the week we look forward to, when we go to our local comic shop and buy our favorite artist's or writer's series. Digital will never be able to say that. Even though you get it on the same day and read it on your tablet, there's nothing like turning the page and

carefully putting it away after you're done.

SP!: Writer's block. How do you get around that creature?
DAVID: Usually when I get writer's block, I stop writing. I begin to read a book or watch a movie. If that doesn't work, I go on to my next project until an idea sparks up in my head, and then I go back to writing whatever it was I was originally working on. But, there have been occasions when nothing helps and I get completely "stumped".

SP!: What is Nekros?
DAVID: *Nekros* is a story about a character named Alejandro (an ailing middle aged priest in South America)— who has a run-in with Death and finds himself "cured" Death gives him an antidote for his illness. How he uses it without knowing is the best part. Readers will be asking, "Is it a gift or a curse?"

SP!: Talk about Black Mass.
DAVID: This graphic novel is set in 1690, in Colonial America, just before the Salem Witch Trials. *Black Mass* is a thrilling adventure about a young woman named Scarlett, who is born with gifts considered by many to be a curse. Scarlett begins to manifest her natural witch powers after watching her cousin brutally murdered. Scarlett's adventure begins after she moves to America from England and runs into her cousin's killer, a malicious priest who will stop at nothing to have her captured.

Black Mass blends truth with fiction to tell a story during a time when America's new establishments were being plagued by a disease known as witchcraft. Many innocent people were accused of it. Others used it as a means of getting rid of society's outcasts.

SP!: Do you research your story ideas? If so, how?
DAVID: Yes, there is a considerable amount of research I do before I begin to write. I read different types of reference books that hold factual information. Internet search engines are also very useful to me. Bottom line: I must read up on whatever the subject matter is before I write my stories. I like for my stories to hold a grain of truth.

SP!: What is your writing process like?
DAVID: Well, first of all, I write an outline of my story. This helps organize my thoughts on paper. Then I start with the synopsis—the main idea. Next, I start writing the story around the major details that were already written in the outline.

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SP!: Do your stories carry a message?

DAVID: Depending on the reader, each story can convey a message, according to their own interpretation. Personally, the stories I write are pretty much based on the concept of "Good versus Evil".

SP!: Do you feel more comfortable with writing prose or with comic book sequential storytelling?

DAVID: I feel more comfortable writing prose, rather than comic book storytelling. Starting out in screenwriting and then venturing off in comic formatting has been an adventure. I personally love screenwriting for specific reasons: adding more details, and having the freedom to pretty much show the world who, what , where, when and why on the characters. With comic book formatting, I have learned to simplify each panel with less detail, in order to give the artist their freedom to interpret the panel.

SP!: What are your thoughts on DC's Before Watchmen project?

DAVID: Honestly, taking a glimpse into the past has always been something I've been into. Hearing back stories about characters and everything before them is always interesting and something I have actually enjoyed. So I'm all for it, if it's done correctly.

SP!: Would a line-wide relaunch of the Marvel heroes be good for the industry? Why?

DAVID: After so many years of Marvel writing the same stories in different scenarios, I would have to say that it is good for the industry. It gives every single character a fresh new start to coincide with all the new movies that are coming out that change the characters' origins.

SP!: What future projects are in the works?

DAVID: There are a few projects in the works, as we speak, one of which is *Tribulations of Abbadon* (TOA), which tells the story of a group of humans who come together to overcome great odds and find themselves fighting for their lives in a war between Heaven and Hell.

Two other projects in the making include *Heart of Stone* (a spaghetti western tale) and *Psycho Billy* (a one-shot story), created by Italian artist Stefano Cardoselli. It is an exciting time for us at NAS studios.

SP!: Where can fans get hold of your books?

DAVID: Currently, they can order our books via online at www.nasstudios.net. We are looking into distribution options with Diamond Distributors.

SP!: How can fans and publishers contact you?

DAVID: If fans and publishers wish to contact us, we are at

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www.nasstudios.net. Publishers and fans can e-mail me or Andrew, the editor-in-chief at david@nasstudios.com or Andrew@nasstudios.com.

SP!: Anything else you'd like to mention that we haven't covered yet?

DAVID: NASstudios has recently published *The Art of Andrew Mangum* (a book which takes a peek into the ten years of artwork Andrew has contributed to the industry), which is currently available on our website.

SP!: David, SP! Magazine appreciates your time! All the best!

DAVID: I want to say "thank you," for allowing me to share NAStudios with you guys and with everyone else who supports independent publishing.

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Visionary Comics

Article and Interview with Chuck Edward Selner
By Louise Cochran-Mason

First launched in 2006 by Chuck Edward Sellner and Charlie Hall, Visionary Comics Studio (VCS)is a publisher with over 70 titles on its roster, a studio that provides support services to other publishers, and a teaching studio.

In addition to their artistic abilities and their interest in comics, Sellner has a background in both public relations and management, and Hall is experienced in business management, accounting and finance.

Visionary Comics Studio's earliest offerings were 6-page stories for Markosia Enterprises anthologies ("In the Demon's Path" was featured in Markosia's Eon Project #3, and "SoulStar: The Dreaming" appeared in Markosia's Smoke and Mirror #1). Next came their own début release, the well received Headlocked (October 2007).

Over time, they produced numerous books, both as a publisher and as a work-for-hire studio (providing administrative services as well as creative ones). They also began recruiting established creators to act as mentors and teachers.

In 2009, VCS became a digital publisher, using a variety of outlets. They also continued to produce print comics. To marshal their diverse products and services, VCS developed two distinct imprints: Visionary Select and Indy-Visions.

Indy Visions is designed to support emerging talent, and is linked to VCS' teaching and mentoring programs. When the company receives a submission that they think has potential and could be a viable book but isn't quite there yet, they support the creators by polishing the book's rough edges (perhaps by editing it or providing professional grade lettering). Indy Visions comics are creator-owned.

Visonary Select showcases titles created in-house by VCS; some are owned by the company, some are licensed, and some have been created for other companies on a work-for-hire basis.

Along the way, they've also had the film rights to some of their titles optioned.

In 2011, the studio reinvigorated its teaching and mentoring programs, sponsoring multi-session comic creation and design courses at Anne Arundel Community College. In 2012, they launched an internship program.
This past July, VCS released Deadlands Volume 1: Dead Man's Hand, their first licensed franchise—which had previously been published through Image.

Chuck Edward Sellner told us more:

SP!: Visionary Comic Studios has fingers in several pies...
VCS: Yes, we do indeed dip into many things, and for many reasons.

I started working in comics years before I launched Visionary with my business partner, Charlie Hall. It was part-time stuff: consulting, PR work, management-type stuff. Frankly, it was pretty disillusioning. The companies I worked with often made decisions and operated on terms I felt uncomfortable with, especially in the way some treated their creators. I stepped back from the industry for a while, but the bug started biting again.

That's when I started having conversations both with Charlie, and Brian Augustyn—both gentlemen with whom I had connected and become pretty good friends. I wanted to get back into comics, but on my own terms, doing my own thing. I specifically wanted to do something that tapped my background and strengths. I also wanted to do the same for anyone on board with me. So, we launched as a teaching studio. With Brian's editorial expertise, Charlie's background in the comics market, and my experience in building new ventures, we felt it was a good approach, which offered something that hadn't been done before.

We would become a haven for aspiring creators with talent, a place where they could hone that talent and skill working on THEIR OWN books, which we would then rep and set-up for publication. It was something that wasn't out there already, and so, wide open for development.

It was a great concept, but the comic market imploded, the publishers with whom we had set up potential partnerships and titles all went under, and we found that only a small percentage of the talented folk we discovered had the determination to stick with it and make comics their chosen profession. For most, life kept getting in the

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way and they moved on. Which was fine, no worries.

So, we did what any business, with a long-term intent to survive, working in an unsure market does: we began to diversify and look for opportunities. We explored niche markets (such as a full service production studio) that there seemed to have little competition. We also began exploring the cutting edge of where the comics market was going (such as digital publishing), and positioned ourselves to be on that edge, exploring new and expanding markets.

The directions that worked well, we incorporated into our portfolio of services. Those that didn't, we phased out. But the core of who we are—a bunch of folks making great comics—has always remained.

We started with a VERY small operation, consisting of two partners and two professional consultants. Charlie and I ran the day-to-day, Brian Augustyn, who served as an editor for years at DC, was our editorial consultant, Dave Lanphear, one of the best production and lettering guys in the business, was our first comic production consultant, and a number of great artists lent their skills to provide some art direction to our studio recruits.

At one point, our talent pool grew to over 50 creators, but again, all aspiring—and most of those drifted away when they realized this really wasn't the road they wanted to take. Yeah, there were a couple we cut—or were glad to see go—but very few. Most were just great folks with jobs, kids, mortgages, etc., that weren't really in a place to both meet those responsibilities and make the jump into comics.

As I got more experience under my belt, I gradually began overseeing our editorial department. We also managed to recruit Jacob Bascle as our ace in-house production chief and letterer.

As we got more established, we started attracting the attention of a number of up-and-coming creators, and some legends in the business, all of whom helped shape who we are today. We just lost Joe Kubert. I still remember spending an afternoon with him in his studio at his school. We sat talking about Visionary and what it could mean for the industry, and I remember his encouragement and support. That changed my life forever. Others have done the same, a veritable Who's Who in the industry.

And, now that we've been in this business, worked the indie market, the digital market, and the mainstream market, played with the big boys, and done a variety of different things, we've grown into a company that has diverse services, built around a central goal of making and supporting great comics.

Charlie is our CEO/CFO. We now have a marketing team of three hard-working staff, a full team of interns learning and getting involved in the comics industry, and a loose-knit group of creators ranging from current A-list talent, to the next generation of top creators, all working with us on various levels and on various projects.

SP!: Visionary Comic Studios offers teaching and mentoring. Can you tell us more about those?

VCS: We began as a teaching studio, and while our initial model was a bit idealistic, we fine-tuned and got back into teaching comics, and we have two tracks for that.

I am the adjunct professor of comic arts at Anne Arundel Community College. Through AACC, we offer a nine-week session on campus, in person, twice a year, to students wanting to learn how to make comics. It's an intensive course, where they learn about every aspect of how to make comics, from conception and character design, to writing, pencilling, inking, coloring, and lettering. Throughout the duration of the class, their main focus is to create a five-page portfolio under close direction, which they can then use to help make that next jump, if they so desire.

Our internship is the next step. Interns sign on for a given number of hours per week (their choice). 40 percent of their time is spent doing day-to-day work in the studio, helping with conventions, marketing, research, etc. 40 percent is then spent in practical application, where they assist in editing, coloring, production work, etc., learning as they do hands-on work. We target their strengths, giving them the opportunity to be more autonomous, and we also help them target weaknesses and learn needed skills. For the final 20 percent, they get the benefit of hands-on, direct editorial guidance on their own creative work. We encourage

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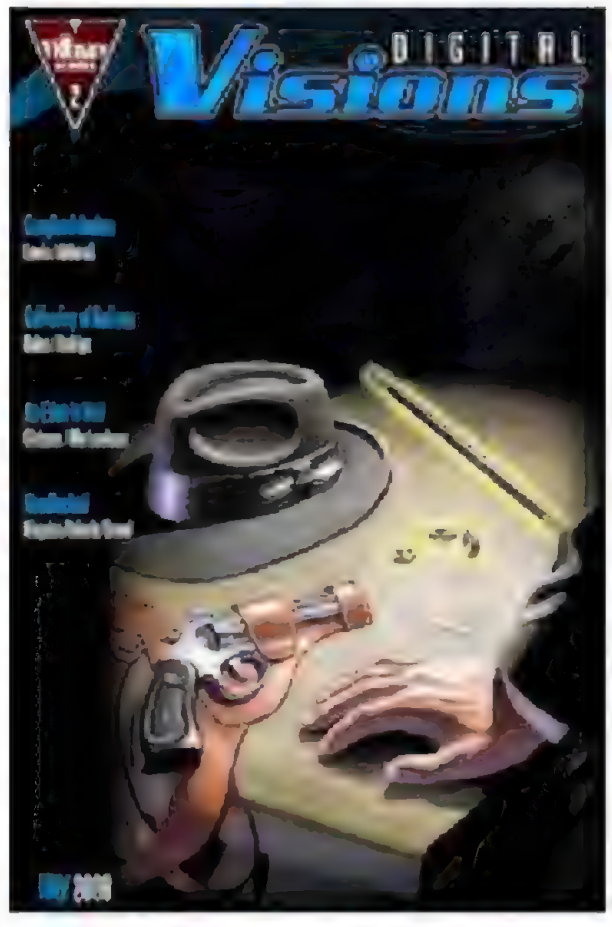

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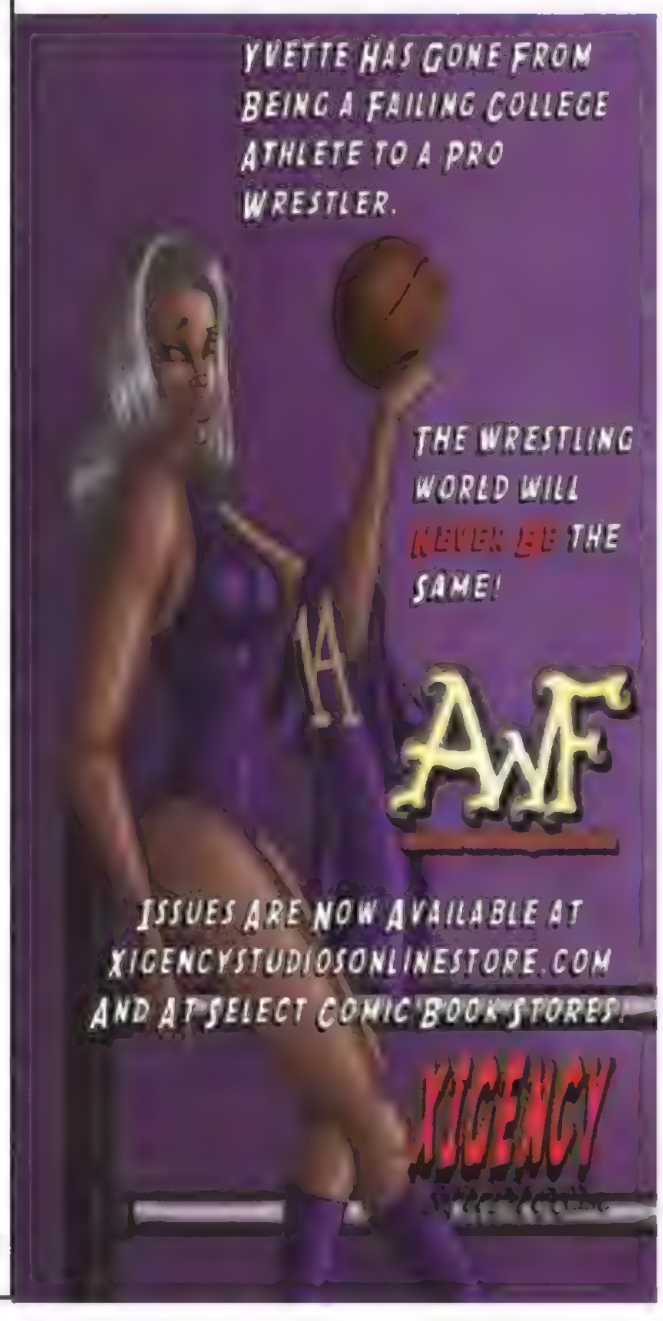
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them, do in-depth review and editing, and help keep them focused.

Both have been well received. Each class has had several students, all of whom have rated the class well, and our interns have gotten a lot of great opportunities, including working with comic book legends and seeing their first published credits in books from top publishers! So, not bad.

SP!: Did retailers respond positively to your "money-back guarantee" on the first issue of the Headlocked: The Try-out miniseries?

VCS: They did, indeed. We had quite a few retailers very appreciative of our believing enough in our own book that we were willing to share the risks with them. I'm also proud to say it paid off, because not a single retailer who ordered extra copies returned them for their refund, so we can only assume that means they sold those books.

SP!: Did it get a VCS a lot of publicity?

VCS: Not as much as we would have liked (what does?) but it certainly helped. Sales spiked on that issue and it was the second-best-selling book from Markosia that month, number one being their Kong license launching. Kind of hard to beat that one.

SP!: Did it get the comic into a lot of bricks-and-mortar shops?

VCS: It got it into more than it would have otherwise. Headlocked is a niche book. In the comics market, overall interest is low, because the only spandex is on pro wrestlers, but as a dramatic series, aimed at those who love and respect the sport of wrestling, it's a huge hit—and for that book, that's what matters.

SP!: Do you think a bricks-and-mortal retail presence is important for small press publishers and self publishers (rather than a purely online one)?

VCS: You know there really is no simple answer to that, as it depends on what your goals are.

If I, as an individual creator, or a small publisher, or a digitally-focused publisher want to, there are avenues for me to tap and exploit a market that completely bypass the direct market. Webcomics, digitally-published comics, Kickstarter, they are there. Are they less work? Are they guaranteed? No, but they exist. As a creator myself, I have to say that is a great thing. It allows the possibility of someone launching a webcomic that would never have a shot in the direct market, and building a worldwide fan base that lets them live their dream. I'd be selfish, arrogant, and stupid to see that as a bad thing.

But if one wants to play in the market and build a brand, build a business, build a library of books available through ALL the means comics are sold—which is still very much the direct market with the bricks-and-mortar shops—then yes, obviously, that is critical.

I think the mindset we all need to break and get over is that there can—or should only—be one way to succeed in comics, and that the existence of different paths to success somehow undermines the one already proven. Digital has shown, conclusively, that it helps build the direct market. EVERY publisher doing both has as much as confirmed this. It's no longer a theory or an opinion. Those who zealously defend their way as the only way have always proven to be the close-minded ones on every subject, who hold us back and never move us forward. We have them in comics too.

For Visionary, we want to support and work in all of the above. We want to continue growing into the digital market, and help define that market for the next 50 years. We want to support and be part of the direct market that has built the industry that we all love and could never have and enjoy without them. We also will be exploring new avenues, like Kickstarter, that allow us to directly connect with our fan base in a way we couldn't do before. Really, why wouldn't we?

SP!: Are Visionary titles publisher- or creator-owned?

VCS: We have both. Titles we own are those titles we created and developed in-house; we own them because we made them. We also have licensed titles, where Visionary as a studio owns the license and thus, owns those books.

However, and we are VERY proud of this, Visionary has NEVER, NEVER sought even partial ownership on any creator-owned book we've published. We have over 70 titles published in our digital library and the vast majority of those books, Visionary does not own. Their creators fully own the properties they developed and created.

By contract, we receive ten percent of the digital sales of any book we publish digitally.

We also offer creators, whose books we feel are strong enough, the opportunity to rep their books to print publishers and for possible film options. We've set up books with publishers like Markosia, eigoManga, and Image—and yes, we've had a number of books catch notice in Hollywood and be optioned. That may surprise people, because we've never announced it, but we know enough in this business to know most times, an option means nothing for the people whose names aren't on the contract—because chances are, nothing will come of it.

Now, if Visionary helps set up those deals, we get a percentage of the profits, but if we don't... we don't—that simple. We never take a piece of what belongs to those creators. It's one thing when a company pays someone full work-for-hire to create company-owned books. But we've seen a number of small press publishers—including some very indie publishers—who bring very little to the table in terms of the reach

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and support they can really offer, and yet, somehow, expect up to 50 percent ownership of the book! It's crazy and, quite simply, exploiting creators, so we refuse to go down that road.

SP!: Do you have any plans to publish more licensed material?

VCS: Yes, we have a full partnership with Pinnacle now, and will be doing more Deadlands comics, including the first project we're doing through Kickstarter. Our new series, Deadlands: Raven, tells the epic story of the major villain in the Deadlands universe, the one who unleashed the ultimate evil into the world.

Check it out at:
http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/470321830/deadlands-raven-graphic-novel

We've been thrilled working with Pinnacle, and plan to do other comics based on their other properties—and lots more Deadlands books. We will also look to pursue other licenses, if the right opportunities present themselves.

SP!: Are there any issues involved in publishing material which was originally published by another company? Were these bypassed by Image comics being creator-owned?

VCS: We loved working with Image and hope to do so more in the future, but I think we realized this particular title just was not a good fit, because of its immediate performance in the direct market. We knew we could do better with it in alternative markets that Image just wasn't positioned for, so we amicably agreed to part ways. Image graciously let us do what we had to do to hit the market we needed to hit.

SP!: Visionary Comic Studios already has an eclectic range of titles. What are your plans for the future?

VCS: First, we plan to continue to release the most diverse and steady line of creator-owned titles into the digital market.

Second, we will be expanding our line of Visionary Select titles, specifically moving more of our books into the direct market in print.

Third, we will be creating in-house more cutting-edge digital comics, taking advantage of many of the new models being explored in that area.

Finally, we plan to launch our

own line of titles, set in a shared universe we've been developing since we launched—just waiting for the right time to spring them on the world. That time is coming fast.

SP!: You distribute your comics in several ways: Drive Thru, Quick Comics, Wowio, Panel Fly, Amazon... Is there a particular reason behind this?

VCS: Yes, it's the core of our identity as a digital publisher. Our whole purpose in digital publishing was to offer creators all the services of a standard print publisher: support, production, marketing, and distribution. We know that to build an audience, the best strategy is to ensure our books—especially those by new creators, with new titles with no name recognition—are available in multiple formats and on multiple platforms. This is simply so that they can be 'discovered' in those various formats and venues by the many potential fans out there. We have books that sell like hotcakes on one platform, but not at all on another; others do pretty evenly on all. Each of those platforms represents sales that those creators would not have had, if we went with only one outlet.

While we support the direct market and the local retailers, we also know that market has a lot of challenges. Some, we all know and regularly bemoan in the comics industry. Key among them is the challenge presented by a virtual monopoly in the distribution of the direct market. Yet, we see movers in the digital market using the exact same strategy, and comic publishers jumping on board. Makes you wonder if they've learned anything.

We refuse to do that—and yes, there are some venues that like to play hard-ball and aren't interested unless you're willing to be exclusive, so you help them build their brand at the expense of your creators and books. But we're cool with that, because in the long run, we know we're helping to create a diverse means of distribution and a broader and healthier market by standing our ground, and we wish others would join us.

SP!: Is there anything you'd like to add?

VCS: Ha, by now, everyone is probably sick of reading already. So, I'll just say thanks for the chance to chat, and I look forward to doing it again.

Visionary Comics Studio has a process in place for submissions that must be followed (or the submission will be deleted unread). First, a general inquiry must be sent to

submissions@visionarycomics.com

Then, Visionary Comics Studio sends out their full submission guidelines and legal disclaimer. No submission will be looked at without the disclaimer, no inquiries or submissions through a con-

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tact us form or any email other than submissions@visionarycomics.com will be looked at.

They will consider stand-alone one-shots, graphic novels, or mini-series, but they must be complete creator-owned projects.

They are also seeking artists for their studio books. New artists must be willing to work for back-end. Once they have proven themselves, they will receive a page rate.

Upcoming Events:

The Visionary Comics Studio staff will be at Baltimore ComicCon 2012 (www.baltimorecomiccon.com) on September 8, 2012, at the Baltimore Covention Center.

Visionary Comics Chief Creative Officer, C. Edward Sellner, and Visionary artist Ale Aragon will be in the artists alley at New York ComicCon 2012 (www.newyorkcomiccon.com) on October 11, 2012, at the Javits Center.

Web Links
www.visionarycomics.com
www.facebook.com/VisionaryComics
www.peginc.com/games/deadlands-2/

A Force to Watch

Article and Interview conducted by Ellen Fleischer

WatchGuard and **Teen Force 5** are two separate teams residing in the same universe, but at different times. WatchGuard exists present-day, while Teen Force 5 is from a period analogous to the 1990s. Both the WatchGuard and the Teen Force 5 pilot stories will be told as independent adventures, in one, double-sized, massive comic book! The comic book will feature two covers, and be laid out in 'flip book' style. Self-Publisher! Magazine recently interviewed Charlie McElvy (writer), Andy Smith (artist on Watchguard), inker Diana Greenhalgh (inker on Teen Force 5), and Eddy Swan (colorist on Teen Force 5).

SP!: How did you all get together?

CM: Andy and I met through a mutual friend, waaaayyyy back in 1997. Our first phone conversation lasted over three hours. Kevin Sharpe and I first hooked up at deviantART, when I first commissioned him for a piece of art (my lead character, Voyager), more than two years ago. We hit it off as well, and have remained more than just client/employee ever since. Pretty much the same story with Diana Greenhalgh, who inks over Kevin, and Eddy Swan, who is coloring the Teen Force 5 story. As for Andrew Dalhouse, we met through Andy. I've been playing editor/publisher, putting the team together, so to speak. :)

AS: It's been so long I can barely remember, but I do remember Charlie searching me out and telling me what a fan of my work he was. I was living in Florida at the time and he was passing through, so we got together for lunch. For a "fanboy" he seemed cool enough, so I accepted him into my tight circle of friends (which I really let anyone into who has a pulse). From there, he would always tell me about the different ideas he had, and with Watch Guard, he really got the ball rolling to do the project.

DG: Charlie followed my work on deviantART for a while. I was interested in his WatchGuard project and we got to know each other through there. Kevin and I are friends and have worked as a team before. Charlie brought the rest of the creative team together, adding Eddy Swan to the Teen Force 5 roster as colorist.

ES: Charlie contacted me, said he might have some color work for me on a project he was working on.

SP!: Some of you have collaborated before. What other projects have you done together?

CM: I'm the complete noob, here. Although I'm unpublished in comics, I did publish my gaming supplement last year, which features art from this entire team. Kevin and Diana worked together on Nova #25 for Marvel Comics. When I published *The WatchGuard Sourcebook*, Andy specifically requested Andrew as his colorist, and so, we began!

AS: I did a couple character designs for him after we first met. He can tell you the characters names. Sorry, but my brain keeps information for a few years, and then purges itself to make room for more stuff.

DG: Kevin and I worked together as penciller and inker for Marvel, and later on some independent covers and commissions.

ES: I did a fair bit of work for Charlie's [*WatchGuard*] *Sourcebook* and related products. I have been commissioned a couple of times to work on both Kevin's pencils and Diana's inks, both by Charlie, and by others.

SP!: Can you tell me a bit about your backgrounds? What has it taken to bring you this far?

CS: I'm a newcomer to comic book writing, but I wrote and self-published *the WatchGuard Sourcebook*. I grew up in Norfolk, VA one of only a handful of white kids, and that, I think, gave me perspective on things like riches (we weren't rich), and how poverty builds better communities in some senses, not to mention a sense of natural diversity.

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I was, essentially, in the minority, and yet I was well-liked in the neighborhood. I actually attended college remotely and received my Associate's in Graphic Design, which I put to use in the sourcebook. I designed the layout and most of the characters' looks. But, I was always set on telling the story that *I* wanted to read, and that led me to finish writing these two stories..

AS: Let's see. I've been drawing comics for two decades now... Yikes! That makes me sound old. I am only 25 though, started young... okay so maybe not that young, but I'll never tell my real age—or weight! I started working for DC in my senior year of the Kubert School, and since then, I've worked for Marvel, Image, Valiant/Acclaim, CrossGen, and other companies, with some advertising work thrown in. I've also written how-to books on drawing: *Drawing Dynamic Comics* and *Drawing American Manga Super-Heroes.*

ES: I am an aspiring colorist, I've done a fair chunk of work for Zenescope's *Grimm Fairytales* series and other titles. I did colors on three books for the *Last of the Greats* series released by Image, and a fair few other more indie books.

SP!: Charlie, you said that WatchGuard started out as an RPG?

CM: Yes, for the Mutants & Masterminds RPG system. The sourcebook was a pretty massive undertaking — basically an official handbook of the WatchGuard Universe. It included over forty characters.

SP:! How did you get the idea for WatchGuard and Teen Force 5?

AS: Well... I had a dream! Oh, wait; wrong speech. I'll let Charlie field that one.

CM: *WatchGuard* is the culmination of a series of heroes that started with Sentinel (originally called Battalion), and continued as I designed and developed more characters. Modeling after some of the team archetypes in comics history, I developed the leader, the field commander, the hot girl, the brick, and the annoying youngster. Eventually, this led to a team of seven, as seen on the cover of the sourcebook, and in the WatchGuard pic on our Kickstarter page.

As for *Teen Force 5,* that was a little bit more of a fluke... I wanted to pay homage to the teen comics of my youth, and I wanted a fun, diverse group of teen characters that had existed at an earlier point. This allowed me to have fun with the 90s. The fans LOVED the Teen Force 5 characters, and it actually led to a licensed product from Vigilance Press, another gaming developer. So, Teen Force 5 built their own legend. (The Anthony Castrillo "retro" cover certainly helped!)

SP!: I saw the pitch on Kickstarter. So, as I understand it, you're telling two distinct stories in one mag. Is there any connection between them?

AS: Once again for Charlie! This is easy...

CM: YES! In fact, two characters appear in *both* stories. In WatchGuard Universe (WGU) history, Teen Force 5 helps to inspire the team that would become WatchGuard. Bluechip (TF5's team leader) has a conversation with Voyager (WG's team leader) in the WG story, after a funeral, which provides the impetus for creating a new team of sentries for Summit City.

SP!: What can you tell me about WatchGuard? Who are they? Why do they do what they do?

CM: WatchGuard is a team of heroes from diverse backgrounds, with even more diverse personalities. They band together as some of them are on the precipice of their public "coming out" as heroes.

Voyager is a metahuman hero who loses much and intends to just remain on the sidelines, but life won't let him. Sentinel has just relocated to Summit City with his mother, who's ill. He's been a hero all his life (Marine, US Secret Service Uniformed Division), and he's ready to make Summit a safer place to live.

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Intrepid just wants to prove herself as a true hero, and not simply a celebrity metahuman. Access is a geeky chick, and SO ready to be a superhero. Garrison just happened to be in town with his ambassador aunt (from Spain), and he's always in for a good time. Mazer is at the facility where Voyager worked as a scientist, and often a test subject. He's in it for the fun and thrill. Finally, there's Deacon, who joins up at Voyager's behest. These two have a history together as teammates, but we don't know much about this, yet.

SP!: And Teen Force 5?
CM: The first three meet up on a random encounter. The other two, Soundwave and Vignette, join up through events depicted in the TF5 pilot story. Bluechip is quite the charismatic leader and he gets them all to stay together. They remain together for decades, until deaths or "life events" separate a few of them. There's a fun sort of dynamic among these teens.

SP!: In what way?
CM: Jupiter and Bluechip have a "thing" between them that eventually leads to marriage. However, there is a future for Jupiter that some of our fans don't like...Tempest and Soundwave both offer to hit on Vignette and Jupiter, alternately, but it's always friendly banter. Bluechip is the cool leader who doesn't let on that he has feelings for a teammate. All of that brings some tension, but also cohesion to this group. That, and Tempest and Soundwave are often ready to go to blows, right from the start. And yet, they'd die for each other...
SP!: Now, how about villains? Who are these people fighting against?
CM: Initially, WG is fighting a loosely organized team of villains. This team's "sponsor" will tighten up his organization and pit these guys against WG frequently. Eventually, they'll adopt the name "BlackGuard," in direct conflict with WatchGuard. Teen Force 5 has a literal "gang" of villains, led by Hard-Knox. The gang is the archnemesis of the TF5 group, and remains so throughout the years, causing trouble as often as possible. They call themselves "Dark Faction".

SP!: In the Kickstarter pitch, you said that TF5 comes from a simpler time. What do you consider "simpler" about the 90s, as opposed to today?
AS: I actually think Watch Guard and Teen Force 5 are more like the 80s; that's the feel I get from it, at least.
CM: In the WGU, there were a few villains—not as many as today—and there was an "ethic" of sorts. A code of conduct, even amongst villains. Not a lot of intentional killing and such. Although, the occasional sociopath certainly popped up. In comics, in the early 90s, the emphasis was more on the fun, adventure, and "flash" of comics, as you may remember. It was just before the prevalent grim-and-gritty stuff. Really, we hark back to the late 80s, but carry that forward.

SP!: Who (or what) would you say are the major influences on your art?
AS: Whew I hope you have time! I have so many influences—some that can be easily seen, and some that aren't as apparent. First and foremost is Joe Kubert. He's one that can't be seen as much, but I love his storytelling, page and panel layout, and pacing. I can only

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Finally, something to get Excited About!!
Subject to Change#1 is Finally Here!!
What is "Subject to Change"?
Only the Coolest New Indy Book you've never heard of!!
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hope that my work has some of that. More obvious influences are Alan Davis, Bart Sears (who was my mentor in the Kubert School, and whom I assisted before I broke in), Neal Adams, John Byrne... And the list just goes on and on and on.
ES: Peter Steigerwald, Nei Rufino, Sunny Gho, Frank Frazetta, and Alex Ross.
DG: Sandra Hope was the inker who inspired me to become one, and I've been influenced a lot by her work, as well as Tim Townsend's and Scott Williams'. I've also learned a lot from other inkers I've been fortunate to meet. Everyone has their own style, and different aspects of tool usage and effects appeal to me.

SP!: What sort of references do you use for the artwork?
AS: For figure work, 90 percent of it is out of my head—that's how I was taught at the Kubert School. However, I will use photo references for some poses and clothing and such. Using references isn't cheating; it's an artist's tool. I also reference backgrounds, like buildings, cars, guns, etc.
DG: I just go with the flow, what feels most natural when I'm inking Kevin's pencils. Sometimes I'll look to a particular inker for inspiration if I'm inking something that has a particular texture.
ES: I look at great pieces of colored artwork to try and figure out what I think makes them work, and then use that to try and improve my images. I also use references for skin and materials.

SP!: How about on the writing end? What would you say your major influences and inspirations have been? Literary, artistic, or otherwise.
CM: Literary, if we're talking comics, Ron Marz, Kurt Busiek, Fabian Nicieza, JM DeMatteis, and of course Marv Wolfman. Outside of comics, Edgar Rice Burroughs. Artistic would be Jack Kirby, George Perez, Boris Vallejo, and anything that came before! There! Oh! Starlin! Definitely Jim Starlin (both visual & literary)

SP!: Who designed the characters?
CM: The VAST majority are of my own design. In fact, for all of WatchGuard and Teen Force 5, they're 100 percent mine. There are some ancillary characters that Andy designed, and more that artist Sean Izaakse helped with. There will be more coming from Kevin Sharpe in future gaming products.
AS: I give all the credit to Charlie. I did some designs based on Charlie's written descriptions but even those were really tight. He really had a great vision for what he wanted them to look like.
ES: Most of the ideas come from Charlie, with help from many artists over the course of creating the *WatchGuard Sourcebook*. I've had something to do with the color-scheme of a few of the characters, I believe.

SP!: Is a sequel already in the works?
CM: Yes! If all goes well with this first set of pilot stories, I have enough material to put a mini-series out for either team. For that matter, I've enough mapped out to write an ongoing, if it proves wildly successful!

SP!: Anything you'd like to add that we haven't touched on yet?
AS: From what I read on Facebook Charlie is trying to build his body to be that of an Adonis!
CM: Well, I'm writing stories that I enjoy, and I hope that translates to enjoyment for a wide spectrum of fans. We've got a bunch of licensed products and accessories coming out, including a (TF5) Jupiter 16" resin kit, as well as the aforementioned Sentinel 6" maquette.
These are stories that I'd like to tell for a long time, so I hope everyone enjoys them, and wants to read more!

SP!: Self-Publisher! Magazine wishes you all the best with that! And thanks for taking the time to talk to us today!
To contribute to the WatchGuard and Teen Force 5 *Kickstarter campaign, please visit http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/watchguard/watchguard-teen-force-5?ref=live before Sunday, September 2nd at 10:14 PM EDT.* The WatchGuard Sourcebook *is currently available at Amazon.com. [Editor adds: We apologize to the project that our schedule did not get this article in front of eyes with any time for them to react to the Kickstarter. We hope people will seek out and support the project anyway.-Ian]*

Littluns' Mark Glamack

Article and Interview by Daniel Horn

[DISCLAIMER: This article contains both religious and political views, which are likely to illicit strong reactions. SP! And Dimestore Productions have long supported freedom of speech and anti-censorship and therefore are running this article without stifling the potential controversy it may stir. We also need to make clear that the opinions expressed in this article do not reflect those of SP!, the magazine staff, or anyone else besides those named in the article. You are welcome to express your opinion of this article in respectful and non-inflammatory ways in our letters section. Anything else, you may contact the people involved directly, thank you. -Ian]

This isn't Mark Glamack's first rodeo, so to speak. This decorated war veteran was working as an animator for Disney when he was drafted into the US Army during the Vietnam Conflict. After the war, Mark went on to contribute to, direct, and/or produce some of film and television's greatest animated offerings; cartoons like HBO's Emmy-winning *Spawn*, Filmation's classic *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* and *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, and Goldcrest Films' *All Dogs Go to Heaven*. He has held such esteemed positions as governor of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and vice-chair of ATAS' Activities Committee. Mark's patented business model has been instrumental in salvaging several animation productions that otherwise would have gone face-down in the cold waters of film and television bureaucracy.

Mark is a veteran in every sense of the word, yet self-publishing his newest work, an illustrated book entitled *Littluns*, proved to be unprecedented experience for the industry giant, one which marked a spiritual turning point for Glamack as well. His first *Littluns* book, *Littluns and the Book of Darkness*, is an all-ages tale, imparting Judeo-Christian values through religious allegory. *Littluns* has received several industry honors, such as the Dove Award, the Mom's Choice Awards Gold for "Fantasy, Myths, and Legends," and an honorable mention at the New York Book Expo. It was also an Indie Excellence Book Award finalist.

In Glamack's book, "Littluns" (a colloquial play on "Little Ones") are diminutive mythical creatures, the inheritors of God's new world after Armageddon. When darkness is loosed upon the Earth for a season, consuming everything in its path, a group of Littluns must keep the Evil One behind the darkness from finding his lost book of spells or the Earth will be destroyed. If the subject matter seems overtly religious, it's because Mark had a bit of a personal reawakening on his journey to produce his book and while I don't necessarily agree with all of Mark's views, he could never be accused of not being a man of the sincerest moral conviction. It's an attribute that shines through in our discussion and one that elucidates a nearly-institutional corner of the American sociopolitical landscape: Christianity.

SP!: Littluns is an all-ages Christian series, but you make an interesting distinction on your blog by welcoming secular readers as well. What would you say the appeal of Littluns is for someone who doesn't exactly have a religious preference or who doesn't necessarily want to have any religious ties?

Mark Glamack: *Littluns* is about life under the most difficult of circumstances—something that everyone on one level or another will experience in their lifetime; the good and bad, right and wrong, being in the light or the darkness. We all have a choice for one or the other—otherwise what would be the point? Although *Littluns* is self-evident of what it means to be a true Christian, not once is the word "Christian" mentioned throughout the entire book. Unlike most Christian works, *Littluns* reaches out to everyone who is looking for answers in a world gone wrong. *Littluns* is a story for all seasons and all reasons, a fantasy that takes readers into reality and universal truth beyond any otherwise-subjective inference. It's for the reader to accept or reject it, according to their ability to comprehend the values presented under God.

For those who don't have any religious preference, or don't want any religious ties, or reject Christian beliefs, or have their own beliefs in contrast to others, *Littluns* offers a Biblical perspective grounded in truth—God's truth—without hitting anyone over the head with it. It's just there for everyone to discover, especially in this end of the age.

Here are three examples of what these people experienced after reading *Littluns*:

"...I truthfully don't have enough viable proof to prove that God really exists, nobody does, but it doesn't hurt to keep an open mind. This book changed my way of thinking and right in the middle I was crying on the metro train just thinking 'wow, he might really exist.'" -SALVE (Salvador C. Carrillo)

Kevin "James" Richardson

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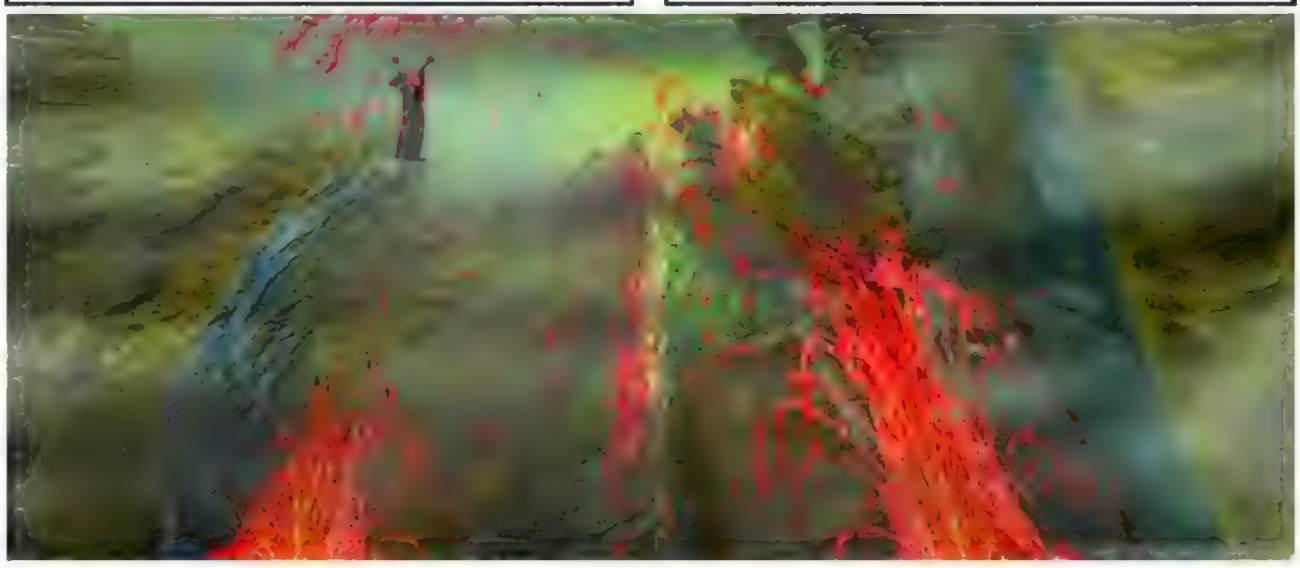

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wrote: "Littluns *is to Christians what* Harry Potter *was to the secular world—yet Littluns is written for both."*

On January 12, 2011, KevaD said on Goodreads: *"A story designed for families, and, one that will stand the test of time."*

SP!: There's a prominent Christian metaphorical skein throughout Littluns. In regards to that, what sort of values does Littluns impart to its readers and how do those values reflect your own?

MG: I have heard that *Littluns* has become a very personal experience for some readers, as it was for me, writing it under God. It really is for everyone, both Christian and secular readers to live the best life possible. This is a Christian/secular fantasy that takes readers beyond their imagination into reality and truth under God. Survival under the most difficult of situations. *Littluns* demonstrates the hope and determination of the human spirit.

I thank God every day for all the gifts and abilities and support He's given me and that He asked me, of all people, to write *Littluns*. What's most exciting is the knowledge that whatever He had—and has—in mind for *Littluns*, it will be perfect, even if He only wanted me to write it for Him and/or those who need to hear what God is saying to a world gone wrong, and in contrast, the knowledge in faith that "...Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven," is for all to experience now and forever.

Since *Littluns* would never have happened without God's intervention and request, it has always been about what He had—and has—in mind for *Littluns*. His vision is my vision. With Him, you can be sure that *Littluns* offers value beyond just a book.

SP!: Has your faith always been such an integral component of your work as an animator?

MG: No. Although I have always considered myself Christian, like most people, I got caught up in the world of man, with a focus on my career and other worldly interests. I had never read the Bible from cover to cover until I finished writing *Littluns*. God surely sometimes works in mysterious ways. After reading the Bible from cover to cover, I now faithfully begin each day reading it again, while doing my best to walk in Christ's perfect example.

Throughout my entire life I have always had a deep interest in children's and family entertainment, along with the creativity necessary to bring animated stories to life. Throughout my career, I mostly followed my bliss, taking my creativity wherever I wanted to go until God came to me and said "Write *Littluns*." At that point my whole life changed.

SP!: With this being an election year, Christianity has really been skylined by both the Left and the Right. I'm curious what your take is on the partisan effect on Christianity itself. I was raised as a Christian, but have since become an atheist. However, I always associated universality with the ethical values catechized by Christ, and that's something you've already referenced: the universal truth. This doesn't seem to be the case when considering politics, where the most outspoken Christians gravitate toward the "fundamentalist" and unsympathetic Right, representing clear bastardizations of Christ's maxims. Do you find that the universality of Christian ethical values has been undermined by partisan politics?

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MG: Yes, both the Left and the Right are saying whatever they think the people want to hear to hopefully eventually seduce a vote out of a large Christian base at any cost. Yes, the bastardization of Christ's maxims, which include non-Christians pretending to be Christian; big names falsely professing to be Christian, bringing in big money through lies and deceit that cater to the unsuspecting and ignorant Christians who know no better—or who do know better and turn a blind eye. Those that do know and support such people do so to support their most questionable self-serving agendas. All Christians and others are in for a big surprise when they fully understand what that agenda really is.

The universality of Christian ethical values cannot be undermined by anyone, if the truth be known. It's important for all of us to know who we are really listening to and voting for.

There are Christians and there are true Christians. *Littluns* helps readers understand the full potential of their worth under God and what it means to be a *true* Christian. Under the very worst of circumstance, true Christians have the power to make a great difference for all things good. The key word for all true Christians is unconditional/uncompromising in the word of God. Anything less is man playing god. False prophets abound in this end of the age and unfortunately, it will only get worse.

I see this election about Satan versus Satan. Anyway you look at it, the people lose. On one hand, we have Obama, who has proven himself a true enemy of God on every important issue. On the other hand, we have Romney, a man who is a leader of a cult which puts their allegiance to their Mormon beliefs above anything else, even above our Constitution. Both men will say anything to get the people's vote, and after being elected, will simply say, "That was then and this is now— things change." The lesser of two evils is still evil, resulting in more problems void of good and wise decisions.

SP!: You were once an animator at Disney and a slew of other studios, and one of the words you use to describe the illustrations in Littluns is "animation-like." Can you describe the Littluns aesthetic and how your experience in animation has informed it?

MG: I wanted to create a novel like no other for readers to experience. Animation-like, because animation is about bringing to life characters that would otherwise be still. Between the illustrations, readers bring the characters to life within their imagination, with the written word expressing and detailing it. The artistic and visual interpretations keep all readers on the same page, where everyone can see all the characters that they would otherwise have to wait to see when the movie eventually comes out. In fact, *Littluns and the Book of Darkness* is a book that is, in some interesting ways, like experiencing a movie, but is really a one-of-a-kind novel that can only be read.

My long, multi-faceted career in the animation business enabled me to go where no one else has gone. With God as my guide, it all became complete.

SP!: With such an illustrious career, what brought you to this particular juncture, where you're self-publishing your own books?

MG: My long professional history includes animator, director, producer, and writer for family entertainment in the motion picture and television industries. I'm a patented inventor, elected to six terms as a governor for the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences; and when I was in the process of funding any one or all of my six developed projects, God came to me and said, "Write *Littluns*." Of all people, why me? I asked myself. I had never aspired to become an author and never in a million years would I have ever considered becoming one. I always believed that there were far better-qualified people to write a book than me. Also, those six projects that mean a lot to me took over a decade to develop and doing anything else just didn't make any sense—at least not to me. But, God was asking me to do this. Never before had I had such an experience of pure love, and needless to say, I shelved all those other projects and have worked on *Littluns* full-time ever since. To make my vision complete without compromise, self-publishing was the only answer.

SP!: Obviously, self-publishing proprietary work is quite different from developing work for an employer, but how has self-publishing affected your work personally and what are some of the benefits you've identified in self-publishing?

MG: Yes, when you're hired by a company and you're not the CEO, you're hired for a specific purpose and expertise. When you self-publish, you're making critical decisions that can make

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or break the company. The publishing process was all new to me and had to be learned and analyzed so that I could make the best possible decisions. Before that decision was finally made, the traditional publishers were unreasonable, still holding onto their antiquated business models that no longer worked. They still want to hold onto yesterday's newspaper that has come and gone. They still want the power of using one or two of their successful authors to keep them in the life and business style they have become accustomed to. Furthermore, they want to own you and a large piece of all ancillary rights associated with your work. Can you blame them? They once controlled it all and now have to face the reality that what once was is no more. With the advent of our digital age, all that remains is identifying the best works and an Internet delivery mechanism to deliver the best of the best to the masses. Amazon and others could do that with a selection of award winning books and reviews.

Imagine an independent publisher offering its readers more than any traditional publisher could or would. *Littluns* did in a book with quality second to none. See for yourself at http://www.Littlunsblog.com. Click on the tab at the top of the page, "Breaking All The Rules." The award-winning family-friendly animation-like novel for young adult and grown-up readers of all ages.

Have you ever wondered why there are no color illustrated novels over 150 pages? First, it's cost-prohibitive. *Littluns* cost over six figures to produce only 5,000 copies. We gambled big-time that only in large-volume sales would we be able to make this work on a business level, or even to just break even. Second, we insisted that all the work, from printing to publishing, be done in the United States. Third, experts told us that because of the high cost of quality, we should have charged at least $50.00 per book. I wanted it affordable to everyone and settled for the rock bottom price of $29.95. If it weren't for the additional costs of doing business, we would have only made $1.00 per book sale. With volume sales, that number would increase eventually enabling me to continue writing.

If we were going to produce this one-of-a-kind quality book, self-publishing was our only alternative. If we were going to go beyond what is to what could be, offering readers a reading experience like no other while not compromising my vision, an out-of-the-box solution could only be found in self-publishing.

SP!: Limited distribution and advertising seem like salient obstacles to self-publishers. Do you find that these are deficiencies in self-publishing, and how do you circumvent those types of obstacles?

MG: If I had the deep pockets necessary to promote, market, and advertise *Littluns*, this all would have been handled years ago. Unfortunately, all we had was the Internet to get the word out—mostly to people who would rather hear themselves talk than take the time to read a good book. Now, in this digital age, and with so many books to choose from, it's hard for readers to find diamonds in the rough. Distributors can't possibly handle the hundreds of thousands of books published each year, and at least for now, are almost exclusive to their current publishers. The book stores aren't moving their inventory as fast as they once did. The only solution is to never, ever give up in the knowledge that when you have something great, and stay with it, and get the word out, it's only a matter of time until readers will discover and experience it.

SP!: Do you have any future installments for Littluns planned?

MG: *Littluns* is complete as it is. There is a possible sequel or maybe a trilogy in my head, if God is willing, and a reader demand for more happens in the future. Since tomorrow is promised to no one, I'm humbled in doing what God asked me to do, and knowing that I will never have to look back and say, "What if?" All praise goes to God.

Hatch a Hometown Comicon

Donna Barr's Dragon Model –by Jennifer "Scraps" Walker

Clallam Bay Comicon ended with a bang! Literally, there were fireworks—courtesy of the nearby Sekiu Fun Days, a community event coinciding with the Comicon.

Now, many people planning a comic convention, makers fair, or creator's showcase would try hard NOT to schedule it on a weekend when there are already things going on, thinking that making folks choose between events would cost them their audience. But when someone's traveling to the remote area of Clallam Bay, in the upper northwest corner of Washington State's Olympic Peninsula, giving folks more reasons to make the trip works wholly in your favour.

At least that seems to be the experience of Donna Barr, the organizer and singular staffer of Clallam Bay Comicon. And if she had her way, more communities in the area would also schedule events for the exact same weekend, so she'd have something to attend, too!

"I've been going to conventions since 1986. Comicons are usually personnel (volunteer)-heavy. I realized that rural areas and small towns—in fact, anyone—can have comicons if they use the Dragon Model, based on one central staff person."

Now, really, think back to the last convention you attended, big or small. With everything going on, how can only one person handle everything? Simple.

"Supply the space, the electricity, and the municipal contacts, and let people run their own bit."

That sounds deceptively simple. Is it really possible to pull off a comic convention with only one organizer? After the inaugural Clallam Bay Comicon, it's a little easier to believe it is.

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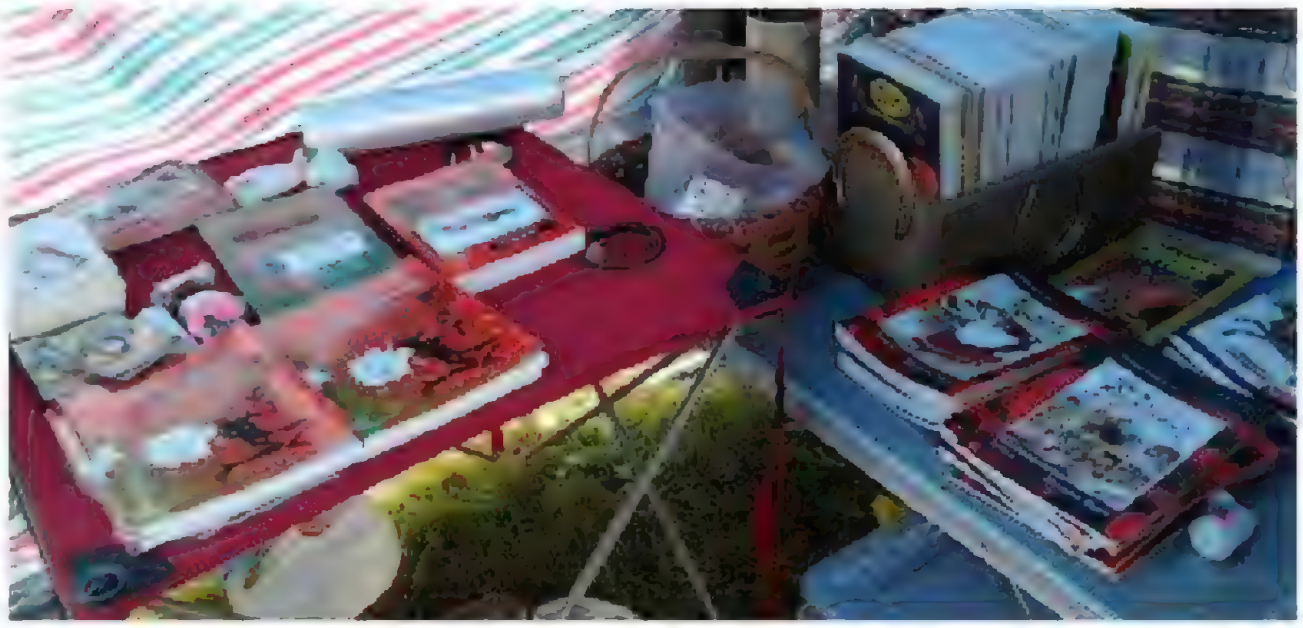
Barr opened up the front yard of her Clallam Bay home to two other writers and one musician to set up their own tables, tents and what have you, and then opened it up further to anyone who wanted to attend. There were no registration fees, no panels, and no badges. And do you know what happened? Everyone sold more than they expected.

Seattle musician Dara Korra'ti (crimeandtheforcesofevil.com) said "I went in treating it as a house party gig, really, and so actually selling albums and merch—as I did—surprised me!" Much was the same tale heard from Seattle author Kevin Boze (virginproject.fannypress.com), who was astonished that "every single person—except one—who came to the sale walked away with a copy of my book tucked under their arm. If I had sales like that at a mainstream convention, I'd need a fork-lift to take away all the money."

And when's the last time the convention organizer had time to do anything but delegate and put out fires, much less enjoy, or even exhibit at their own convention? That would be right now. According to Barr, she broke three figures in sales at her own comicon. That's practically unheard of, in my experience.

So what's the secret? Aside from years in the industry and a list of contacts that would make most of us starting out pea green with envy, the deciding factor seems to be the willingness to just go ahead and do it.



Barr, who turned 60 this year, has been in comics since 1986, when a story of hers in a hand-bound book found its way to an editor at Eclipse Comics. Still going strong with multiple comics series and novels, Barr's goal in creating and promoting the Dragon Model is to "create comicons all over the Olympic Peninsula, so any creative person can join, tour or just enjoy, on the same weekend. And to have a comicon I can do in my—or anybody's—own town."

Maybe you're not in the Olympic Peninsula. Maybe you're in the rural Midwest or just a slightly-less-than metropolitan area and you'd love to have your own comicon (literally) in your own backyard. How do you go about it?

1. Start small. "San Diego [ComiCon] started in a hotel basement," reminds Barr.

2. Keep it simple. After all, the folks coming to show their work are supposed to be professionals, right? Trust them to be able to handle their own arrangements. Less work for you, more freedom for them.

3. Supply the basics: space, electricity, and municipal contacts. Depending on your area, this could mean an event permit if you're having it in a public park, but you might be able to work around that by working in terms of a garage sale.

4. "Low booth fees, no admittance fee, no badges." About 20 people showed up to the 2012 Clallam Bay Comicon, but that's a guess. Barr says, "If you have to worry about numbers, you're too far forward in the baby-step process. It's about the cheap and easy, not the nail-biting worry about numbers."

5. "Baby steps, always baby steps! If it's not easy and fun, don't do it!"

The 2013 Clallam Bay Comicon will be held during Clallam Bay/Sekiu Fun Days, July 13-14 at the Three Sisters of Clallam Art Gallery in Clallam Bay, Washington. Details for obtaining table space are posted on the 2013 Clallam Bay Comicon page on Facebook or at www.donnabarr.com. Or email donnabarr01@gmail.com for more information.

Jennifer "Scraps" Walker is the artist behind the webcomics Cocktail Hour and Where the Geeks Are. Her newest project, *What to Feed Your Raiding Party*, is the comic book cookbook that challenges gamers to cook their way out of the fast food dungeon. All of her current projects--blogs, cocktails, and comics--can be found via her online hub, www.jenniferwalkeronline.com.

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Subject to CHANGE

ISSUE#1 ON SALE NOW!!

Staff Introductions

Ian Shires and John Helmer interview—each other

We encountered John Helmer as we were pulling together people to re-start SP! Magazine. He offered his services as an interviewer, mentioning his website, www.comicbookinterviews.com After some discussion, we came to an agreement that we both are happy with to bring original interviews to SP!, as well as increased attention to John's website—where he's interviewing a lot more people besides today's self-publishers.

Last issue, we did a feature in which two new staff members interviewed one another, so that we could get to know the people behind the interviews. This issue, we're going to delve further into that vein, and John and I are going to take a look at each other. And so, here we go.

SP!: So tell us, what got you involved with comics in the first place?

JMH: The first comic books I read were DC war comics in the mid-1970s. My family traveled to Upper Peninsula Michigan every summer and dropped the kids off at summer camp for a week or two. There was another camper that had a stack of *Unknown Soldier* comics and let me read a few. I was hooked. When I returned home, I began searching for comics to read and came across *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Being ten, I identified with a teen-aged Peter Parker and gobbled up every issue I could lay my hands on.

Fast forward to high school, where my creativity in writing began to develop, I created a tongue-in-cheek superhero team called The Unknowns. I still have all the original drawings. The one-page issues were very popular among my friends and classmates. They were a bunch of do-gooder heroes with black and white morals.

One of my sketches included a robot dressed in dark red with a giant maple leaf on his back, sort of a hang glider set-up. I thought it was the neatest idea, with my mother's relatives being from Canada and all. Soon, the robot was running around Canada, smashing common criminals and cleaning up the streets of Toronto. I named it "The Leaf," and everything developed from there.

Years later, my best friend and college buddy, Brad Eastburn and I decided to make our own comic book and print 500 copies of it. I wrote the script, Brad helped me and polished the dialog, and we published a four-page modern Leaf story with a colored cover titled *The Leaf -Summer Slam 2005.* Brad penciled, inked, and digitally shaded/toned the pages.

We're now four issues into *The Leaf,* with another six nearly completed in various stages. Red Leaf has published over twenty books of *The Leaf* and other projects. It's been a great learning experience and a dream come true.

SP!: At what point did you decide that reading them was not enough and that you wanted to be involved in making them?

JMH: Well, that's tough to remember. I guess, when I read my first comic book, I wanted to make my own. I'm the oldest of five and have always been the leader type. So, managing comes naturally for me. I wrote and drew my own creations and handed them out as a fifth-grader. When I got back from summer camp, I started scrawling and scratching out characters. That would put me at ten years old for making my own characters and stories.

SP!: You mentioned to me that you are a teacher. What grades have you taught, and what subjects?

JMH: I've taught four grades: first, third, fifth, and now sixth. I've been creeping upward in the grades, not by my own choice, but it does suit my language arts background and writing skills. I do enjoy teaching writing to students. As a first-through-fifth grade teacher, I taught all subjects, as those grades are self-contained. Now, as a sixth-grade teacher, I only teach reading and writing. Five classes a day, and it's a blast.

I tutored students at Arizona State University for several years. I helped undergrads and grad students write and structure papers. I didn't write anything for them; just helped the students understand flow, structure, content, and references.

SP!: Do you ever use comics actively—or even indirectly—with your students?

JMH: Oh yes, it's a great lesson to teach. Students learn in a multitude of ways. Some are visual learners, so creating functional text as visuals helps students comprehend content. I have several units that include making a comic book for expository writing, as well as for narrative writing. To exclude a teaching tool, such as a comic book, is to limit an educator's tool set and thus limit the opportunities a child has to absorb a concept.

SP!: I struggled with this throughout the 90s and early 00s—how do you balance a time-consuming career with both making comics and running a website?

JMH: It's a real challenge, to say the

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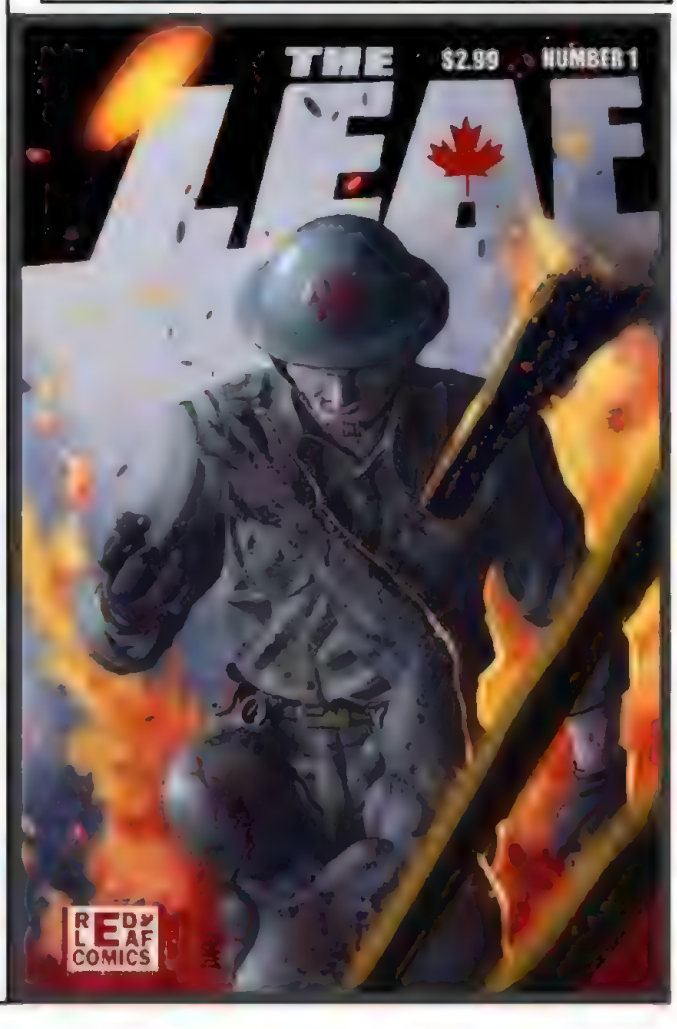

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least. I am so very blessed to have the most incredibly understanding wife. Kim is patient and tolerant when I have deadlines or need to write a script. I do work at odd hours to avoid taking away time from my three daughters. They are amazing and need lots of nurturing, so my schedule can be crazy. I try to get up an hour before everyone else and write or put together a book for publication. I answer emails when I can, to keep up with Red Leaf Comics and the creators. Comic Book Interviews does take a few hours a week as well, but my primary focus is on the comics venture and not as much on the interview website.

Balance is the key word. Sometimes I go overboard and spend too much time on Red Leaf, and that's when Kim reigns me in. She's an excellent judge of my responsibilities and knows when too much is too much. I'd work on creating books and writing twenty four hours a day, if I could, but it's not practical.

SP!: Let's dig into your comics work. Tell us about Red Leaf; how did it come about?

JMH: In stages. First, Unknowntales.com, then my work over at Surprising Comics, and finally, Redleafcomics.com My creations from high school and college were formed under the company I called Unknown Tales. I developed a website and posted character bios and sketches by myself and by friends who drew character designs. The blogspot is still around, although it hasn't been updated since 2008. You can visit http://unknowntales.blogspot.com/ to see some of my early work. I would design a character and write its origin. Then, at a comic book convention, I would ask a professional artist—including Sergio Carrillo, Ron Lim, Bob Hall, and others—to draw them. It was a great way to cement a concept.

This is the period when Brad and I created our first comic book, *The Leaf—Summer Slam*. We sold copies to friends and relatives and gave a bunch away. I even dressed up in a life-sized Leaf costume—all in red with the blades attached to my back—and handed out hundreds at the San Diego Comicon in 2005. Somewhere, there's a picture of me in that costume. LOL! The second stage of my publishing career was with Mark F. Davis and Surprising Comics. Mark produces anthology books with superhero and sci-fi stories. He reprinted the four-page story from the *Summer Slam*. Brad re-toned and we re-lettered it to improve what we could. Brad and I co-created a second Modern Leaf story for the next issue of *Surprising Theater*. I also wrote a Golden Age Leaf story for issue number two. It began the concept of the Leaf as a legacy hero. In issue number three, I wrote a 26-page Modern Leaf origin tale with Golden Age and Silver Age Leaf flashbacks. That pretty much ended the Leaf at Surprising Comics, for the most part. I did publish one more two-page short story, in which the Leaf meets Surprising Comics' main hero, Skyscraper. It's a great romp in the Marvel storytelling style from the 1960s. My involvement at Surprising lasted from 2009 through 2011. I do cherish those days, and Mark and I still speak frequently about comics, sports, and politics. He's a phenomenal guy and he inspired me to push forward the next stage of my career: Red Leaf Comics.

While working for Mr. Davis, I purchased www.redleafcomics.com and developed the website and webstore. In November, 2010, *The Leaf* #1 was launched, featuring a Golden Age Leaf story and two backup tales with World War Two supporting characters. Issue two featured a twenty-page Silver Age Leaf story, set in 1973 and written by my friend, Michael Sacal from Heroic Tendencies Studios. Issue three reprinted the Modern Leaf origin tale with new lettering and tones. Issue four is due out in September, 2012, and features Michael McSorly battling a villain named Pheromone.

SP!: What titles are you currently working on or putting out, and who is working with you on them?

JMH: Issue number four is complete and ready for press. In November, Red Leaf will publish issue number five, where the Modern Leaf heads to Germany to recover the remains of a long-dead war hero for the allies, who's been buried in a Berlin bunker since 1945. January brings *The Leaf* number six in living color! Red Leaf rolls in 2013 with color Leaf tales filled with action and excitement. Scottish Artist Paul Moore has drawn the Leaf versus Sharktooth and Oregon artist Steve Niemela brings to life novelist CL Werner's script showcasing Scorched Earth—a villain bent on destroying the earth to prove global warming exists.

SP!: Where do you see Red Leaf going over time?

JMH: Red Leaf currently publishes numerous creators' projects, from Jon Gilbert's *Kendra –Dracula's Daughter* to Dino Caruso's *Gryfalcon*, as well as a host of other creators' characters and stories. We will continue to help creators publish their dreams.

We plan to release the first Red Leaf graphic novel, reprinting the first three Modern Leaf stories. As well, we plan to diversify our universe. *Abominable*

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Tales #1, featuring Zomboid—the zombie android will hit stores in October. There are also several unannounced projects that I am unable to mention due to IP restrictions, but these concepts are fresh, catchy, and out-of-the-box ideas. I tell Mark Davis during our weekly talks that they have they "Chew Hook." I think that kind of difference sets an idea apart from the pile.
We are also developing a Leaf 30-minute animated cartoon for video release. The project is in the negotiating stages, but the preliminary concepts are fantastic!

SP!: You also do the Comic Book Interviews website. How did you get into that?
JMH: CBI is an outlet for creators to talk about themselves and their properties. The response has been unbelievable! There are more than 300 interviews on the website from *Star Trek*'s Walter Koenig to Mike Rickaby, owner of CE Publishing. My high school days bred an interest in interviewing, as I worked on the school newspaper as a journalist. I guess that stuff never leaves you...

SP!: You have interviewed a diverse and expansive group of people. How do you keep it fresh and interesting to you?
JMH: I try to interview anyone with a voice. If you can create, you have a story. That's what CBI is all about. There will always be small publishers, especially with the advent of print-on-demand and the internet. Where there's a voice, there's a story—and CBI will be there to relay that story.

SP!: Your perspective on creators gives you a different view of the industry. Where do you see publishing going, in the short run, and the long?
JMH: Everybody I interview or work with says that digital is here to stay. It's like having two children. You wouldn't dare forsake the older child for the new born sibling. You have to love them equally. Digital will survive and push the industry in ways paper comics couldn't dream of. I do believe that paper comics will one day dwindle to non-existence—at least in the case of new issues. Environmental concerns, costs of paper, shipping, and other factors will eventually make cutting down a living tree to make a dead paper comic book a thing of the past. To think we used to brutally hunt whales in the ocean to near extinction...
One day, new comics will all be digital. Ten years down the road? Fifty? One hundred? One day, though.

SP!: John, talk about some of the creators you've worked with...
JMH: I've mentioned several already, but there is one guy that has been the backbone and brought Red Leaf into the future, and his name is T. Warren Montgomery. He's lettered almost EVERY Red Leaf advertisement, story, and comic, and without his undying love for comic books, we would not be here. I can't say enough about his professionalism and creativity. Look at any Red Leaf comic book and you'll see an amazing logo. He's created them all!!!

SP!: What else would you like to get across to the magazine's readers?
JMH: Self-publish. Self-publish. Self-publish. Look at the deluge of Marvel creators flocking to Image comics and other small publishers. It's a mad rush to get their ideas in print. And it's for one reason and one reason only—Intellectual Property Rights. Own Space Guy and you own Space Guy's rights. IP rights translate to revenue, in terms of media channels that include toys, games, movies, TV shows, and other products.
The big guys are leaving the Big Two to create and control big characters and make big money. No secret there...

SP!: John, thanks for letting me pick your brain and for taking time out of your busy life to talk with us, and participate in our efforts here.
JMH: Ian, I appreciate your interest in small publishers. Red Leaf Comics supports artists and writers who want to create for either Red Leaf or develop their own properties. Please visit www.redleafcomics.com and give us a try. Look out for some amazing Leaf stories and more characters to come, including Zomboid—the Zombie Android!

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And now, PART 2:

SP!: Tell the readers a bit about yourself...

Ian: Well, at this point in time, I'm a 45-year-old disabled type, stay at home dad. After a long series of surgeries on my foot, and a few years of just being ill, I'm at a point where I'm finally decently ok again, and working to rebuild some of the things I had going over the course of the last 25 years of publishing stuff. My goal right now is to put together something that will outlast me. That can survive if I were to take ill again or whatever.

SP!: How did you get involved in Dimestore Productions?

Ian: I started Dimestore when I was in high school, as simply a small press minicomics publishing outfit. It didn't take me too long before I started taking on publications from others, and doing some loftier things—like in 1987, I did what was probably the first ever "crossover" title that involved about five or six other small press titles, drawing them all into one "multiverse". The mainstream books were all doing it—Secret Wars, Crisis—so, I figured, "Why not make an event comic for small press?" It was fun. Anyway—it was all because I had sent in a letter to Comic Buyer's Guide in 1985. I forget what it was really about, but it ended with a statement like, "Someday I'd like to write comics". From there, Matt Feazell sent me some *Cynicalman* minicomics, saying "Why don't you, then?" and Chris Howard sent me a *Flaming Hot Dog* minicomic. By March 1986 I'd launched *Dungar the Barbarian*, and a month later, *Mysterious Visions Anthology*. It got into my blood from there. I can't imagine who I'd be today if they hadn't followed up on that letter in CBG.

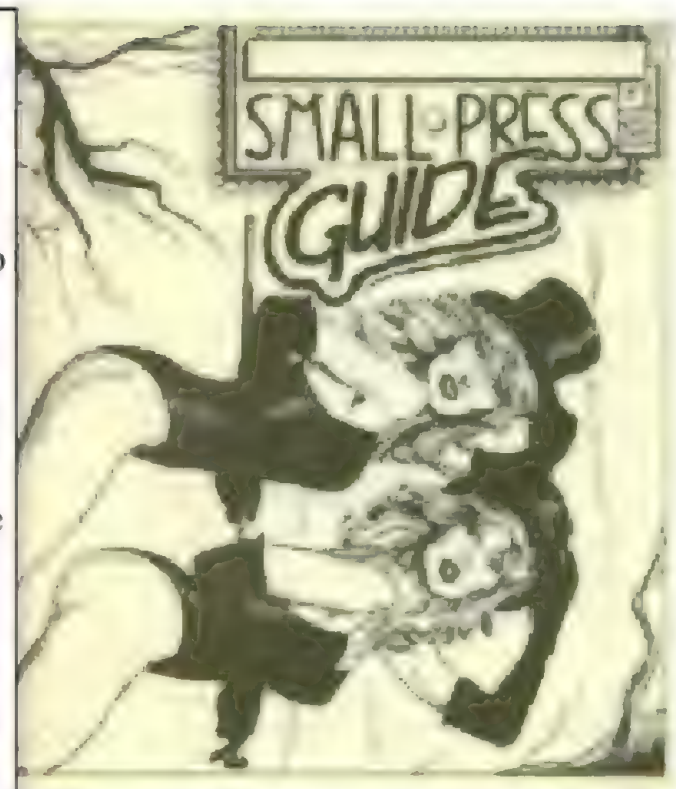
SP!: What side of the creative process are you most comfortable with: writing, drawing or other aspects?

Ian: Well, let's get this straight: my artwork is nothing that should be in comics. I did indeed draw my own comics for the first few years, even refined my "style" so it didn't completely hurt your eyes, but... I don't draw if I don't have to, and only for goofy jam comics at conventions will I break that rule. So. Writing is what I have always been interested in. Telling stories, developing characters... I also write song lyrics, and tend to babble in editorials and such, wherever I think I have something that needs to be said. Publishing other people's work has also been a large part of my time in the industry, from finding new talents and working with them, to running a printing service. I did that for a long time, taking the files, setting 'em up, and getting 'em through the best printers we could, and out to the world.

SP!: How was Self Publisher! Magazine formed? What are its origins?

Ian: My first "industry support zine" was back in 1987, which I did on a challenge from Tim Corrigan, who said that I should try to spearhead a directory of people involved in small press. Remember, this was before we had an internet. The result was *Small Press Guide*, which did its best to give people a way to contact one another. The nature of printed things, though, is that the second they are printed, they are out of date. Things change. People move. So, the data survives in the SP! Hall of Fame, but unfortunately, a lot of the more detailed info of what each person did, remains locked in the publications they produced and the magazines that covered them in the day—stuff that I would love to take out of my boxes so that I could update the info better... but I just haven't gotten to it, yet.

Anyway, I was later given the opportunity to try to "clean up" a controversial newszine called *Comic Update*. It was run by someone whose



mission was to stir up shit, no matter what. It's not worth mentioning his name, because he finally disappeared under rumours of kiddie porn and stuff, so, yeah... I didn't manage to clean up anything, but I did get it in my head to start running a newszine that was more fun and inclusive, and did some new things that other zines were not doing. So, when I dumped *Comic Update*, *Self Publisher!* was born, in March, 1989. *SP!* ran monthly for a good while... though over time, it hit a number of bumps and blocks, usually because it got too big to keep organized without a computer. I mean, I was doing it on typewriters, cutting strips of paper and pasting them onto layout sheets. And in those times, if you didn't keep your schedule, you were sunk. Later, when I did have a computer and had learned how to use it, I began translating the efforts into online terms. I did the first ever online distro for small press in 2000... There was nothing like it on the web at that time. Unfortunately, my investment in software was lacking, and soon other people came along and did it much better. And I was starting to have my health issues. Still, I started up a new zine called *Obscurity Unlimited (OU)* for a time, which tried to dig into what was going on in small press in the changing times, as everyone was getting onto computers and technology was changing how stuff got made. It eventually evolved back into *SP! Magazine*. I turned over editorship of it to my wife and to others, as I was more involved with printing things and running Small Press Idol by then. But it all crashed in a heap in 2010, when I got

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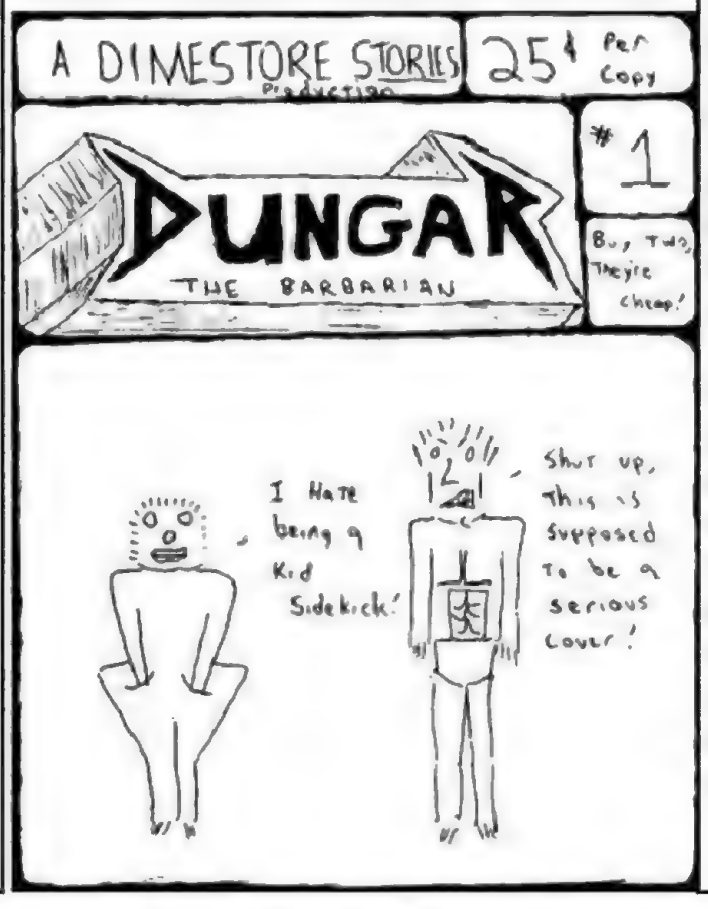

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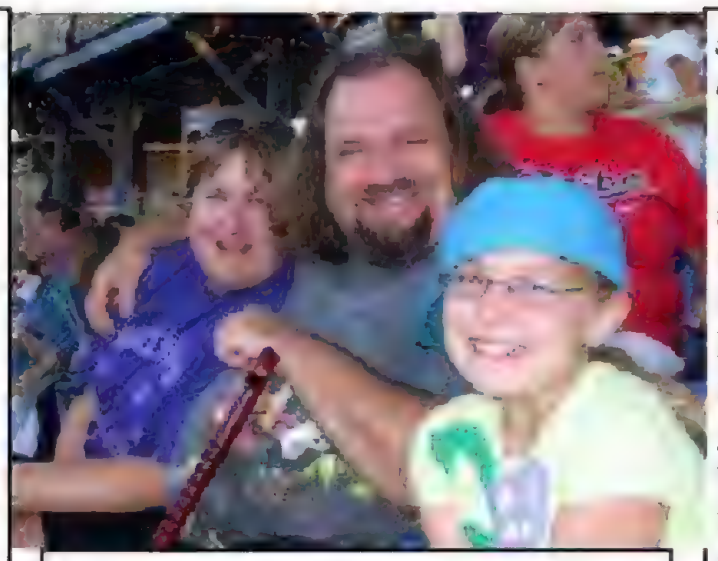
really ill for an extended time. At this point, I'm more in the place I was when I started *OU*, trying to figure it all out again. This is the third issue to make it out on schedule in the new effort. I'm just enjoying the ride, again.

SP!: What are your job duties at SP!?
Ian: Right now, I am holding onto the managing editor role, which means I'm keeping track of who is doing what for which issue, trying to get more reviewers to help me review stuff— 'cause I'm good for a lot of reviews a month, but not nearly enough to really represent what's really coming out on a constant basis. While I am enjoying this role, I also know that at some point, I want to turn it over to someone else. I have a great copy editor on board, and a solid group of people who are having fun doing articles. I know we're a long way from where we can really be calling this a success, though. We're still figuring out the logistics of getting people to read the zine, and balancing that with making available print editions and PDF editions. We're also determining how to best grow this without falling into the trap I've fallen in before, of too much too soon and then getting too big for our own good. I'm just doing everything no one else is in place to do right now; there is no other widely read zine about small press that I know of at this time. So, building something that can sustain itself is the goal, and I know I'm going to have to turn over control of this and that to others when I can, but I also see that very few other people have the luxury of having the time to do this, without having to worry about it making money right now. For us to get good people in to carry it into the future, we'll have to change our model of operation at some point.

SP!: The magazine is primarily in digital format. Is this where the industry is trending?
Ian: I am a firm believer that printed publications will always have a place, especially where it comes to comic books. People love having a collection, something they can spread on the floor and look at, and say, "Yeah, I have all the issues of this series." I think this is something that sparks imagination in kids; the challenge of seeking out all the issues of something. But. Digital



formats are here and here to stay. You can take them with you anywhere and not worry about folding over a corner of the cover. They are going to continue to develop and change, though I don't think we've seen the true emergence of a standard that will last. I'm using PDF right now, but I still have to learn more about getting into things like iPad stores or whatnot. I kinda slept through their beginnings and fell a bit behind. The problem with trends is that they come AND go. AOL, MySpace, Facebook... the face of "being online" has continually changed.

My goal is to study those trends, seek what's really working (like, I've tried to see any real result from Facebook, and I just don't. People ignore 98 percent of what they see there. Who has time for it all? You either get hopelessly lost in pointless debate with people that aren't going to see your point anyway, or you're sucked into some dumb game your friends are playing.) Moving into the future, the magazine will be in whatever formats people are really interested in seeing. We spent six months trying to post news and reviews on a steady basis, before we announced "monthly print editions," thinking that print issues would not work. But, guess what? No one wanted to keep up with things on a daily basis.

SP!: Where do you see SP! ten years from now? What will it look like?
Ian: It's impossible to say what it will look like. I do think I'll still be at it, in some way. Exactly what shape my role will take will be up to the natural evolution and expansion of things, but I've had the interest to COVER self publishing, for decades. I don't see that interest going away. When I decided to start things back up, after I was starting to feel better, I said, "None of this makes any sense, without *SP!* running like it should be." So, I'm working on getting it right and making it something that will go on long after I'm gone. Because, if it's not there, where ARE people getting to know about small press? Facebook? If Matt Feazell, when he wrote to me about small press in 1985, had not had Tim Corrigan's *Small Press Comics Explosion* zine to say, "This is where to go" about, would he have written to me and changed my life? Would I have gone from nerdy, insecure, dyslexic high school kid... to putting together *Small Press Guide*, two years later? The future is fun to speculate about; all I can say for sure is that I will keep trying to do what I can, for as long as I can.

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I'VE BEEN TRACKING THE HALFLING THAT STOLE MY RUBY CLASP FOR THREE DAYS NOW.
NOW THE SHADOWS OF THE FOREST WILL GIVE WAY TO MUCH DARKER ONES... THOSE OF CITY STREETS AND PLACES TO HIDE...
IT'S HARD TO TELL IF I'M TRACKING HIM... OR HE'S LEADING ME.
WE ARE GETTING CLOSER TO CIVILIZATION...
Chasing Shadows
Ian Shires-story
Chris Kavinsky-pencils
Rob Dubnicka-inks/letters

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SP!: Do you read comics published today?

Ian: Not mainstream, not even occasionally. I have a steady diet of small press stuff that I read and review. That is what interests me: the people who say, "I'm gonna do something different, on my own."

SP!: Talk about some of the talent you have worked with. Who should we keep our eyes on?

Ian: Well, I've really run the gamut on working with people. From people I've had draw stuff I wrote, to people whose work I published in anthologies or stand-alone books, to people I've just handled printing for. I've worked with hundreds of people. Maybe even a thousand, if you count all the people who came come through the Small Press Idol contest. I mean, I know a number of folks who I have worked with that have gone on to their own personal commercial successes. I suppose the most notable would be Max Ink, who walked up to me at a Mid-Ohio con way back when with a portfolio, and I put him to work on *Dungar*. We worked together for a good decade. Flash forward to now, and he's doing great for himself with his *Blink* graphic novels. But I mean, I think I could list a dozen more names and still probably miss some great people. I think I prefer to keep my eyes on the NEXT new, potentially great person… so keeping your eyes on *SP! Magazine* would be the way to go.

SP!: DC has re-launched with the New 52. Marvel has Marvel Now! Can rebooting a universe save the comic industry… or a company?

Ian: Well, I'm not sure. I mean, I'm from the day and age when they saved a comic by getting a great new writer/artist team to take it over and just tell better stories with better art. Walt Simonson took over *Thor*. Frank Miller took over *Daredevil*. Alan Moore took over *Swamp Thing*. Those books became more sought after, people got excited about them. If you're re-launching a universe with the same writers and artists that took the previous one into the crapper, is that going to sustain itself? I don't think so. Can it be done and work? I mean, possibly… but it's really gotta be good stuff and catch the imaginations of new readers who would then latch onto it, and support it, and tell their friends. Without that, it's just a gimmick. It's why I stopped reading mainstream comics: they stopped being about characters, and became about events that "changed everything" every year. I remember a few years back, being in a book store and I saw a rack of comics. I stopped to flip through an *Amazing Spider-Man*. I was like, oh crap, when did Spidey become a Manga! It just didn't appeal to me. But also, I read some reviews recently about *Swamp Thing* that were very positive and, if you could still pick up a copy in any public place anywhere near me, I'd probably go buy it. But today, grocery stores don't have 'em, comic stores are disappearing… so where is the comic book industry? How do you sell books when the major chain bookstores are closing and everyone is on Facebook ignoring 98 percent of everything?

SP!: Valiant comics has recently re-launched after a dozen years or more. Can they survive in the current market place? How would you manage a new upstart?

Ian: Managing a new upstart depends on budget. This falls back onto the thought that the market is in too much of a state of change to effectively know what is going to work. I'd hate to have to worry about a budget right now. You don't know when you invest in something, whether it's going to work six months from now. It's why I haven't turned back to my own comic book, just yet. I have stories written and I want to do them episodically, so they come out regularly on a schedule and I can print issues and have a series that can be collected. I mean, when I was

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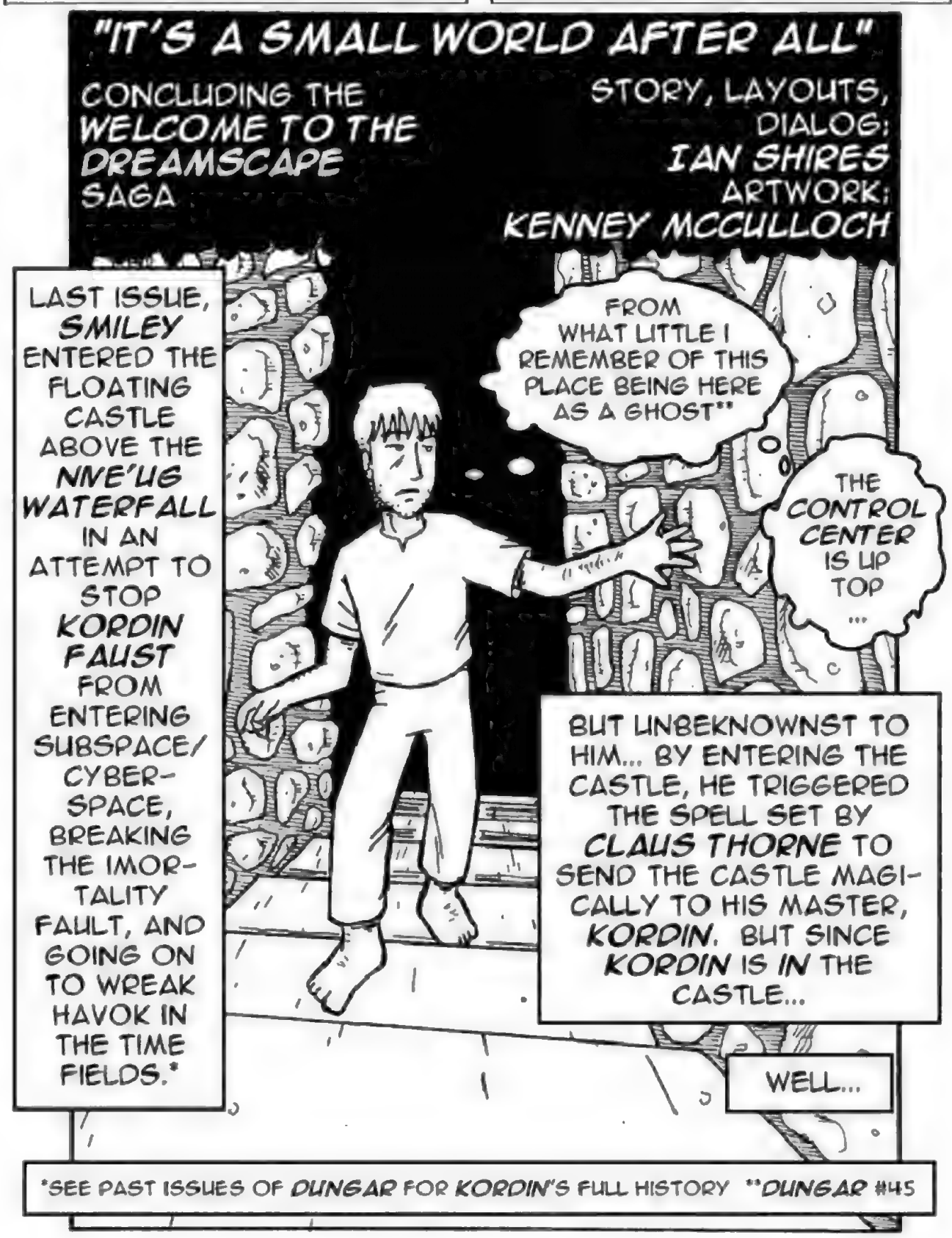
"IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL"
CONCLUDING THE WELCOME TO THE DREAMSCAPE SAGA
STORY, LAYOUTS, DIALOG: IAN SHIRES
ARTWORK: KENNEY MCCULLOCH
LAST ISSUE, SMILEY ENTERED THE FLOATING CASTLE ABOVE THE NIVE'LIG WATERFALL IN AN ATTEMPT TO STOP KORDIN FAUST FROM ENTERING SUBSPACE/CYBER-SPACE, BREAKING THE IMORTALITY FAULT, AND GOING ON TO WREAK HAVOK IN THE TIME FIELDS.*
FROM WHAT LITTLE I REMEMBER OF THIS PLACE BEING HERE AS A GHOST**
THE CONTROL CENTER IS UP TOP ...
BUT UNBEKNOWNST TO HIM... BY ENTERING THE CASTLE, HE TRIGGERED THE SPELL SET BY CLAUS THORNE TO SEND THE CASTLE MAGICALLY TO HIS MASTER, KORDIN. BUT SINCE KORDIN IS IN THE CASTLE...
WELL...
*SEE PAST ISSUES OF DUNGAR FOR KORDIN'S FULL HISTORY **DUNGAR #45

(Continued from page 33)
growing up, that's what the dream was. Personally, I don't know what's going to make a book successful enough to make a career of it, with today's tools, so I am going to spend some time examining and learning, and talking about it in the magazine—and hopefully that will make a better indie scene for us all.

SP!: There has been a major tidal wave of creators moving from the Big Two towards Image and creator-owned properties. Is this good for the industry? How so?

Ian: Well what it's good for is selling movie rights. If you're telling great stories for the Big Two, you're providing them with ideas they may not have to pay you any more for when they make a movie about it. This is more of an issue of people hoping their fans will follow them and they can get a bigger slice of the pie. I have been largely creators-rights since I started, so I'm not going to fault anyone who has taken the time to build a following in the majors and then steps into the indies to do pet projects. If you're in a position to do it, great. It also opens doors for new people to step into the Big Two to try their hand at characters, and maybe spark new interest there. Who knows when a breakout will happen, and new fans will latch onto a new creator and make an old title a collectible? Just like it happened in the old days, lol.

SP!: How can small publishers survive in today's climate?

Ian: I think right now, small publishers need to figure out how to make big noise. There are ways, but we need to build even better ones. We can't preach to the choir; we have to figure out how to get in front of real audiences and show them our stuff is every bit as valid as anything else. It is all about building fan bases that will follow you. If you don't have the luxury of working for the Big Two on Spider-Man or Batman first, then you need to support any place that is willing to give you a stage and eyes pointing at that stage. To continue that analogy, many great bands got discovered in dive bars. But NONE get discovered in their garages. You have to get out there. Do your homework so you know what you are doing, and then take the risks you must to be on a stage. Play every gig like it's in front of 100,000, but every song like it's just for one person. Your balance between artistic integrity and commercial success is how you survive.

SP!: What advice would you offer a creator producing his/her own graphic novel?

Ian: I'd advise doing a bunch of anthology work, shorter stories, and other such episodic arcs, before settling down to tell the big story in a graphic novel all at once. Like I said, it's all about building and having an audience that will follow you.

SP!: In ten words or less, why is SP! important for creators and fans?

Ian: We're by and for the people. We never give up.

SP!: Ian, thank you for your time.

Ian: You're welcome. Now, let's turn our attention back out to others. This has been fun.

AH... I WOULDN'T DO THAT IF I WERE YOU, LITTLE MAN!
ALL PEOPLE RESPECTS HER AUTHORITY!
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It's Hip to be Square (and Profitable too!)

A look at the Square Up system by Jenifer "Scraps" Walker

Picture this (or think back to your last convention): You've got a potential buyer standing right in front you. They're loving what you're telling them, laughing in all the right places, and you think you've got the sale. Then, the inevitable question comes: How much? Now, you probably have a sign out saying how much your books and prints cost, but people always ask. And, then comes the death knell: "Oh, man, I don't have enough cash."

You've got two options: haggle it down to the cash they've got, losing out on profit but making the sale, or let them walk away. Sure, they might promise to go to an ATM and come back, but the minute they walk away from your table there are no guarantees. If you can't close the deal right then and there, chances are good that something else is going to catch their eye and they'll forget you in the sensory overload that is your average comics show. Unless, of course, you can take credit cards.

Credit cards used to be (and, in some cases, still are) a hassle that only large, steady sellers could afford. Merchant agreements—the necessary formalities for setting up credit card acceptance—sometimes require a minimum balance in your business checking account (some as much as $2000) and come with fees—not just for the transactions, but for the terminal, printer, imprinter, receipts and monthly maintenance fees. (Intuit—the maker of QuickBooks—has a smartphone payment option that costs just under $12 a month in fees, on top of your transactions, regardless of whether you've made any sales that month.) Until recently, unless you were doing a show every weekend and raking in large sales, you were probably spending more to have the service than you were earning from it (at least I know I was). Let's also not forget the need for electricity at shows, and how much some venues charge for the privilege of running an extension cord 20 feet.

The advent of smartphones, however, is changing how we live, work, and play, and many companies out there are doing their best to make it easier for the little guys (that would be us) to do business like the big boys. Square Up is one such company. Offering a totally free start-up solution and only charging fees per transaction, Square Up makes it super simple to start accepting credit cards. All you need is a smartphone with a 3.5mm headphone jack (like those on iPhones or Droids) and the ability to download and install their free app from the app-store your phone prefers. They even have a cash register-like app for iPad users.

When it was time for me to get a new phone last fall, I chose my Droid with the express intention of being able to then get a Square reader. The reader is a small attachment which pops into the headphone jack to allow you to swipe the cards through. I signed up on their website for an account—again, free of set-up charges—and they sent me the reader for free. I've since noticed you can buy the reader in Wal-Mart's electronics department (good if you're in a hurry) and, when you create your account, you'll receive a credit for the purchase price of the device. Having used this service a couple of times now, "out in the field" I think it's safe to say it's done wonders for my business. Processing the cards is a breeze—though there is a bit of finesse involved in getting the cards to swipe (it helps to squeeze the reader around the card, I've found), and you don't have to worry about little slips of paper, as the buyer signs on the screen and the receipt can be sent electronically to their phone via SMS or email. I did purchase a small stylus ($5.00 at my local WalGreens) to make the signing easier for folks, but that's the only outside expense I've incurred to use the system.

The transaction fees are nominal—anywhere you go it's always going to be around three percent of your sale; that's just the industry standard. From the app, I can access my sales history, making it easy to reconcile inventory and money at the end of the day. When I get back to my computer, I've got an email for each transaction, with a running balance at the bottom of each (which represents the sale amount minus the fees). Another plus is that each day's transactions (up to a cut-off time of about 6PM EST, as far as I could tell) are transferred to my bank account the next morning. With sales over the weekend, the transfer email is in Monday morning's inbox. I consider this the height of convenience.

Bottom line? While cash may still be king at comics shows, craft fairs, and other venues, many merchants are going paperless. Being able to take credit cards increases your chances of making the sale then and there. Making it easier for folks to buy our books is what it's all about, right?

You can sign up for an account at www.squareup.com and begin taking credit cards as soon as the reader arrives in the mail.

Jennifer "Scraps" Walker is the artist behind the webcomics Cocktail Hour and Where the Geeks Are. All of her current projects—blogs, cocktails, and comics—can be found via her online hub, www.jenniferwalkeronline.com.

Getting Started: The Idea Point

Jay Savage's HOW-TO series

Hello there, creators of alternate realities! Jay Savage here with this issue of *SP! Magazine*'s "How-to" article. If you recall, last month, I spoke of how important it is to be passionate about creating comics to be successful. This issue, I will be giving my opinion on where and how to start creating your first comic.

Now, most of you, no doubt, have already created a comic. I hope to be able to stimulate your creative process as well as that of those who have not plunged into creating a comic book, just yet. I hope you will agree that for every unique comic you come across, you will find plenty that are like most comics we have already seen. So, I will start this article at the "idea point" of creating a comic.

The first thing you need to do is have an idea of what type of story you would like to tell. There are many genres to choose from, be they super hero, crime, western, sci fi, etc. There are also many things to consider when deciding what type of story to tell, if you are concerned with being innovative in your story telling. Yes, anyone can write a zombie story. Some do it better than others, but bottom line is, zombies are zombies, and the difference from one book to another is the writer's ability, and that's about it.

However, coming up with the next long-lived best-selling book is a much larger task. To do this, you need to move away from trends in readership. You can't take a popular premise and change a few aspects and expect it to be around for very long. Someone else will come along and change a couple of aspects of your premise, and then they become the hot ticket. Here are a couple things to consider when creating your next amazing comic book.

Be Visionary

You absolutely must look ahead and try to come up with a premise that will survive current trends in readership, while setting the trend for some time to come. Do not paint yourself into a corner that you will not be able to get out of later. A great property is expandable and adaptable over time.

Write About Something You Know

If you know nothing about time travel, do not write a time travel story. If you absolutely want to write a time travel story, then you must do a lot of research on the topic, so that your story will be accurate and somewhat believable. Comic readers are very critical and will recognize flaws in you comic, if your premise doesn't seem like it could actually happen. You are also bound to write a better story or plot if you have some understanding of your topic.

Do Not Focus On the Obvious

You absolutely should consider focusing on the more obscure aspects of your book. Choose something that allows for a focus on the characters themselves, rather than their abilities. Readers will connect with your characters if they can relate to them. An ability-driven story will quickly grow stale. Do not write about the costume. Instead, write about the person inside the costume.

Let the Idea Come to You

Many times, creators have a specific idea in mind, but start to run into roadblocks in the creative process. This happens because they are not flexible with their desires for the story or plot. A great idea or story will rarely end up being anything that you thought it would be when you first started the creative process. Go with the changes as they present themselves and allow the idea to evolve into something much better than you'd anticipated. A great story will write itself.

That's it for now, my friends. Please consider what I have mentioned above, and I am sure you will find the process of coming up with an idea much easier.

Find Jay at: https://www.facebook.com/jay.savage.35

P.O. Box 214/ Madison, OH 44057 USA
Letters@dimestoreproductions.com

It's been about 7 years since SP! Ran a letters section. It's certainly an old school concept, in the face of message boards and Facebook and whatnot. However, we still feel that there is a place for readers of the magazine, to express their ideas in the magazine, so they can see that we are here to listen and do our best to reflect what people are interested in seeing in the zine. To that end, I open this up to our one and only letter writer from last issue, hoping others will see how this goes, and we can dig in even further next issue.

John Barfield (jbart4sale@yahoo.com)

Good Afternoon Ian and Staff. I usually do not have the time to read your books or emails, however I did take the time to download and read your latest magazine and recent email, and I understand your desires and frustrations. I know how difficult it is to find your place in the market place and improve your placement, so it is with this in mind that I hope you do not mind a little feedback to help you with increasing your readership.

1: Improve your covers! Everything is judged on a visual level before it is ever chosen whether it is food, relationships, ads or magazines, it first must be visually desirable and interesting or it will never be picked up and accepted. You can do this by running a contest for artists to submit a Cover Piece to a featured comic (think... HEAVY METAL). This will improve your image and provide professional artists with exposure to creators, art marketers and art lovers too. (Alex Ross and other artists lends his own artistic vision to a variety of comic book characters thus providing an interest in the books and the characters).

2: Study your competition. Check out the layout of other magazines in the professional market and discover "why" they layout their story lines, art, and ads the way they do....."SYNERGY!" (before a story ends, another one starts, and most stories are continued to another page, thus creating a flow and continued interest in your magazine). If I read a book or magazine and the first couple of pages do not capture my attention or is boring then I will not be interested anymore and my desire to continue with your product (magazine) will cease to exist. First impressions mean EVERYTHING! And every magazine should make a "first impression".

3: Give Back. Create a program or contest that gives something back to your readers. Make deals and connections between your creators/companies and your readers so that you create an interest and following.

First of all, John, thank you for taking the time to write. I have given some careful consideration to what you have said, and want to address your points.

1.) I am to blame for any lack-luster design elements currently on the covers. I'm no graphic designer or art director...however, I do think so far we have sported some really cool artwork. Right now, we are running under a model of asking the issue's Cover Feature Article subject, to provide original art. I understand that having an Alex Ross cover, would get all of Alex Ross' fans to check out the magazine...however, this magazine is not about "professionals" per se. We think that the readers of SP! Are more interested in seeing new creators. So while I am not opposed to the idea of running a contest for cover art...I am also going to have to weigh that against already having the next 3 issue cover slots taken by projects who are launching new books and doing interviews to appear in those issues...and the continued increase in interest in attaining that kind of coverage. I would love to hear from MORE readers about this subject of what we should feature on the covers.

2.) Now there are some parts in here I wholly disagree with. While I have, and do, check out what other magazines do, I—personally-HATE when a story in a magazine is "continued on page 215" and you're on page 30. Especially in our model of providing how to get in touch with people at the end of articles, I much prefer the idea of ending an article and starting a new one on a page, than having start of article after start of article, and expect people to flip around to finish each one. I think people are smart enough to know that in SP! - if you run into n article that is not interesting you, you can flip forward 2 pages and find out about someone else. I hate to sound dismissive of anyone's thoughts and expertise when they have taken the time to bring them up here, but I site magazines like Discover and computer mags, which I read frequently, and never see an article finished in the back. I don't know—I'd really like to hear more voices on that.

3.) Now this is a point I totally agree with. We've done a number of things in the past, including running comic-giveaway programs, limited edition offers, all the way up to running Small Press Idol– which started originally as part of our magazine as a way to launch an anthology. What we can do in today's day and age, will need some further examination, and I think there is potential for some cool things once we hit our stride. I don't rule out the return of Idol at some point as well. Our goal here at SP! Is to connect new creators with new fan bases. We're still understaffed and un-funded, but if the interest people are starting to show in what we are trying to accomplish is any indication, I think we'll be able to do a lot of cool things in the issues to come.

I thank you again, John, for helping us get started with a new letters column, I hope this sparks some good debate and inspires others to express themselves. I also hope that I don't come across as too set in my ways, or put anyone off from debating. I'm certainly not infallible, and, I also know that moving forward, I'm going to be stepping down from direct running of this zine. Take the time to write in to us, the info is up top.

Seven Years in Dog-Land

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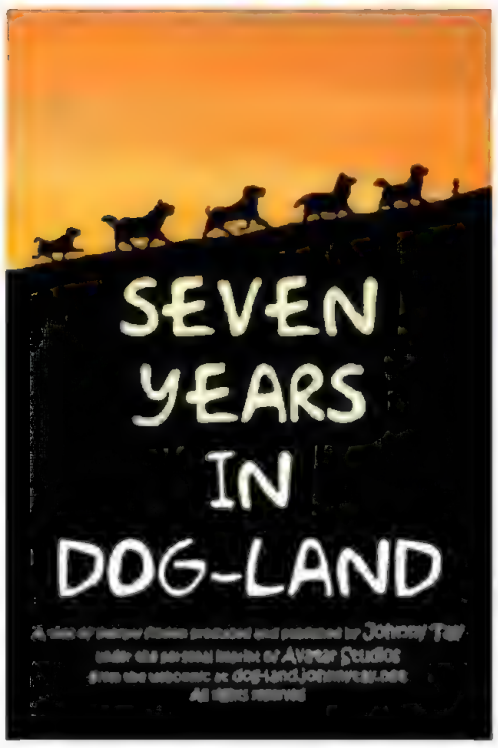

Written and Drawn by
Johnny Tay

Avatar Studios

Check it out at:
Dog-land.johnnytay.net

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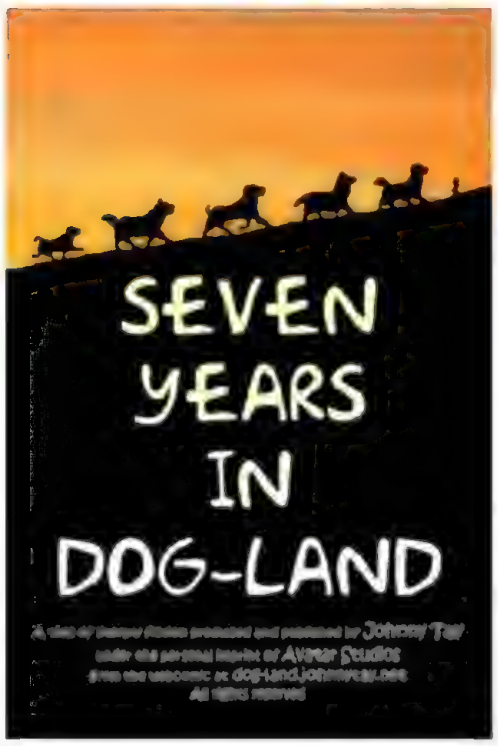

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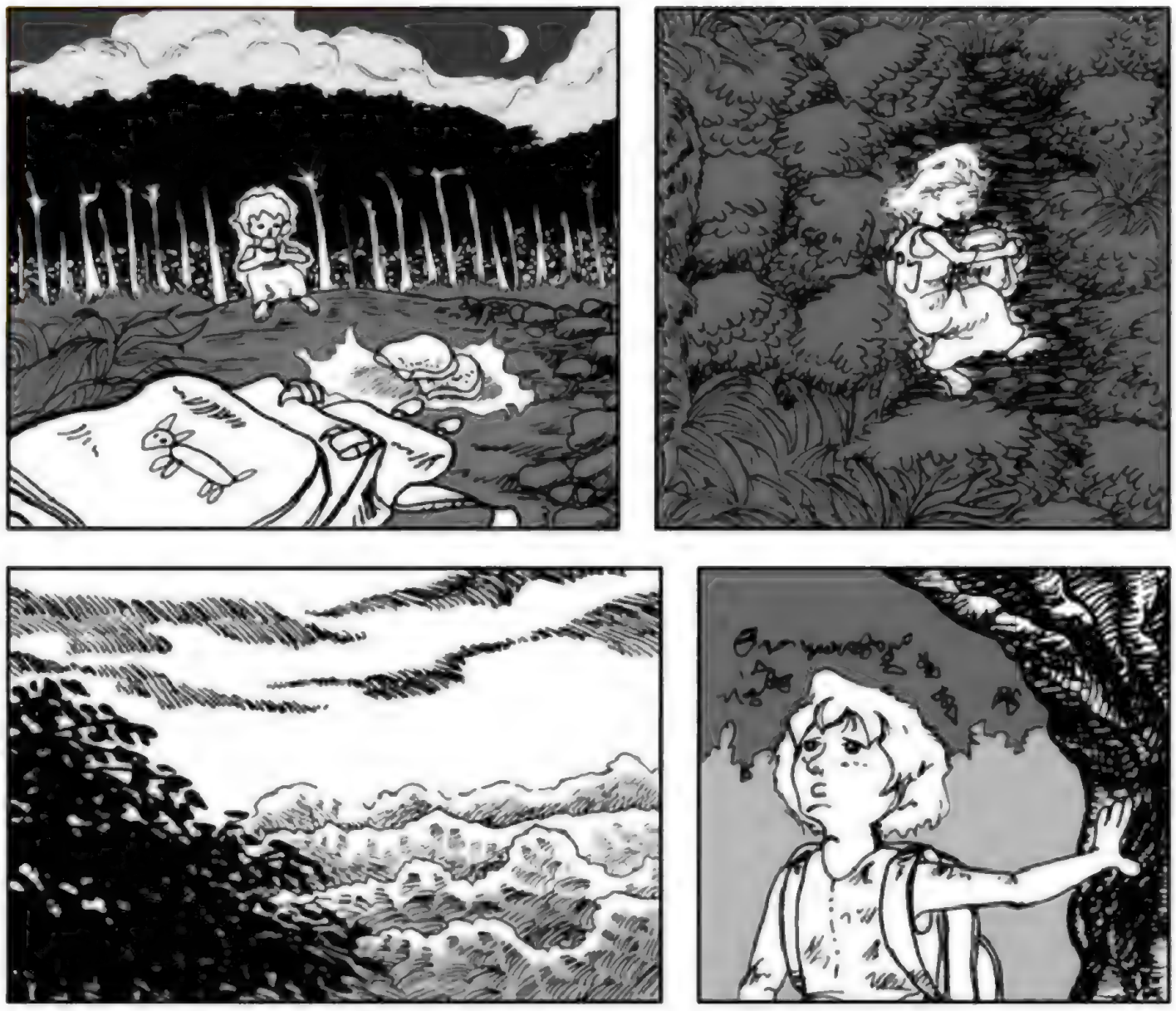

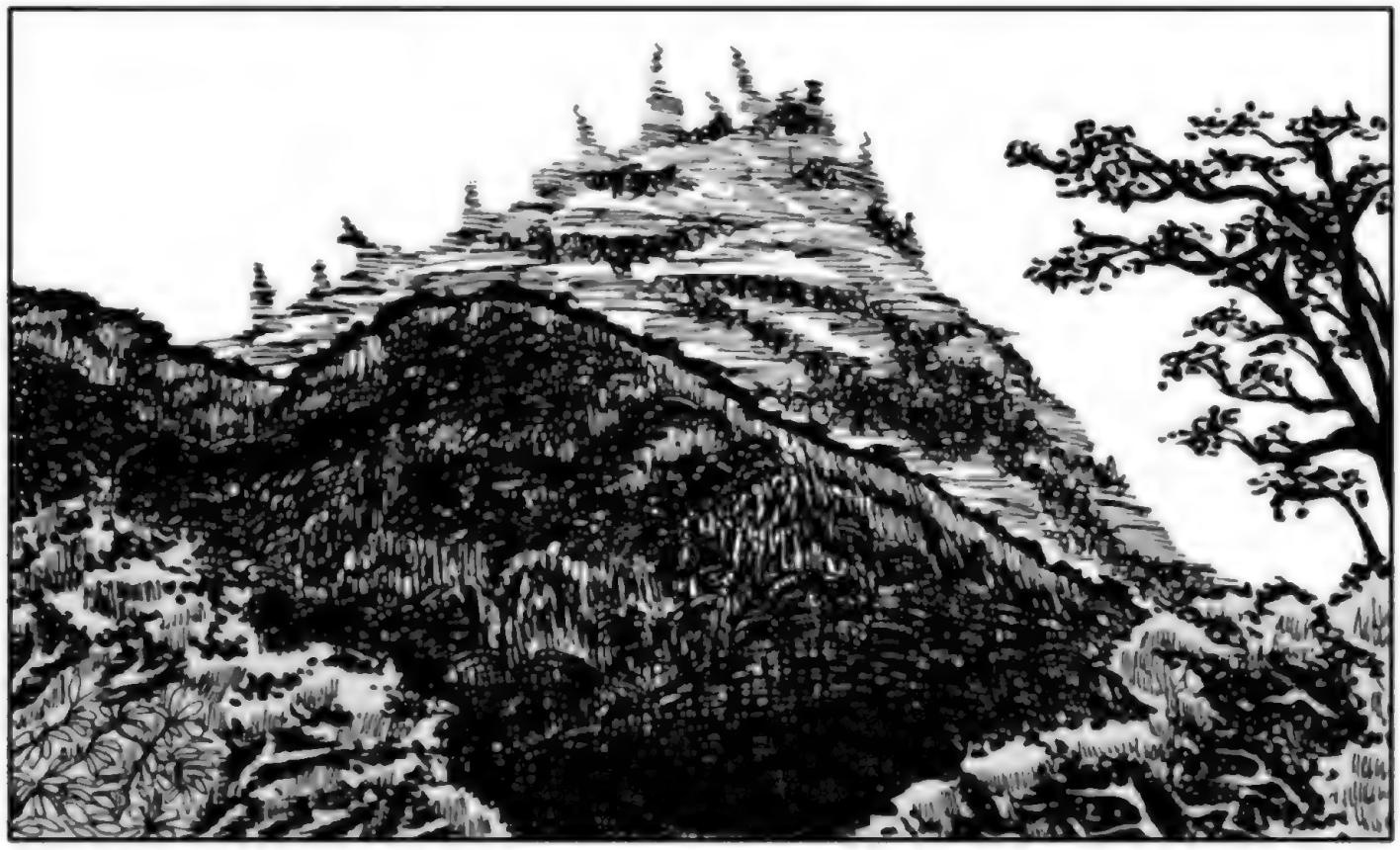

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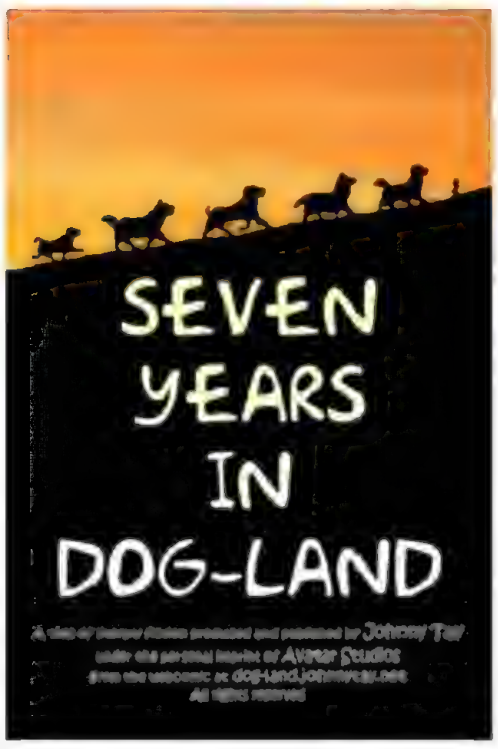

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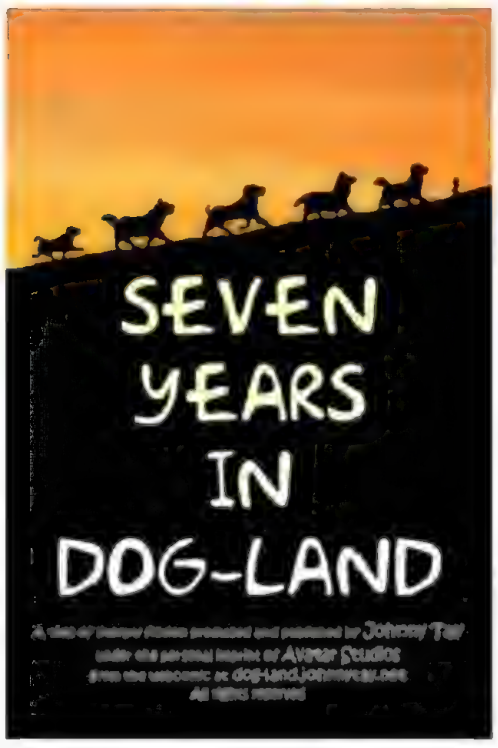

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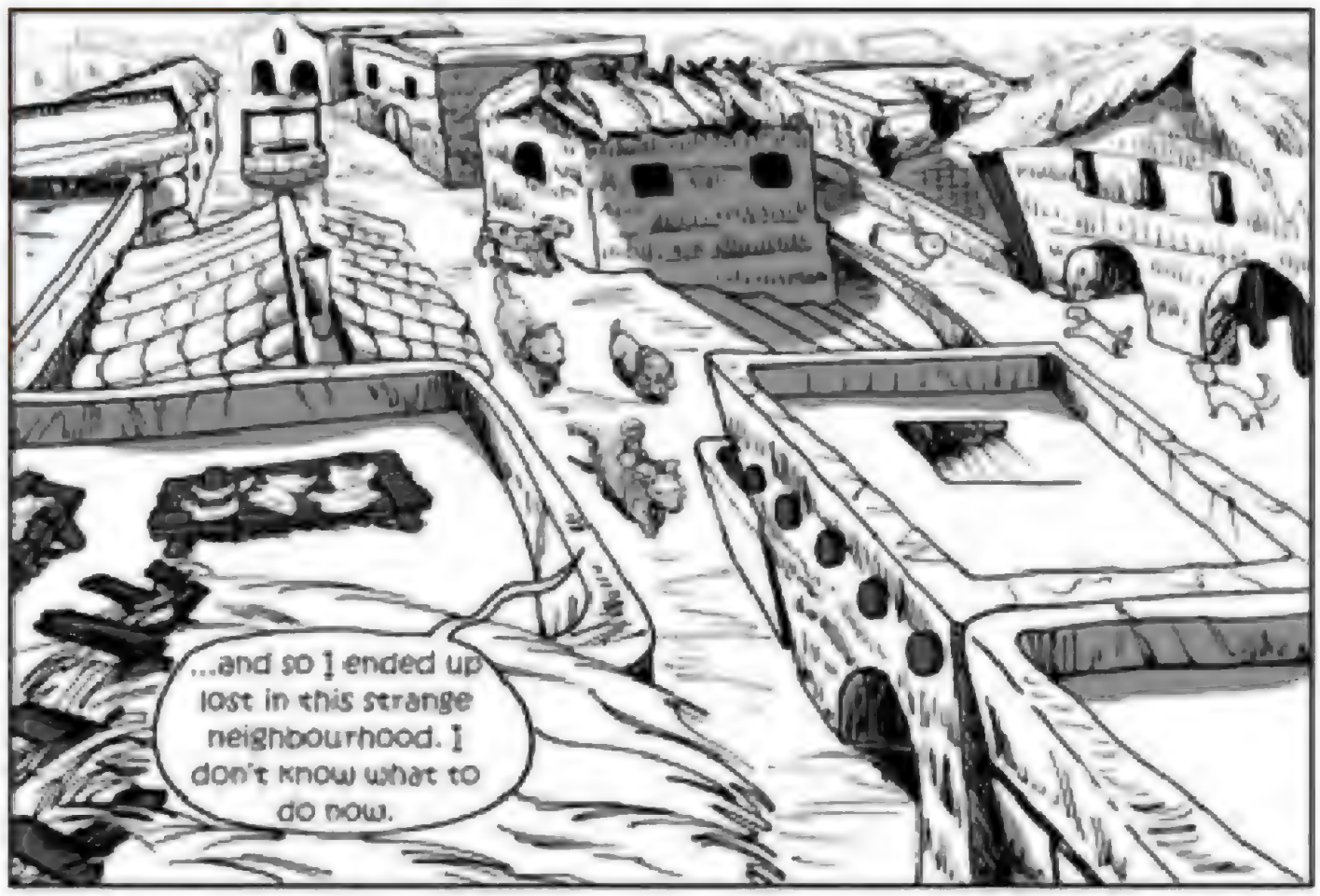

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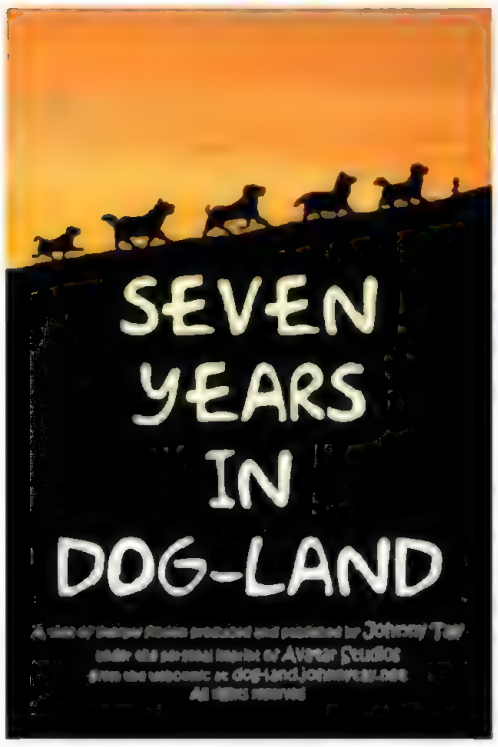

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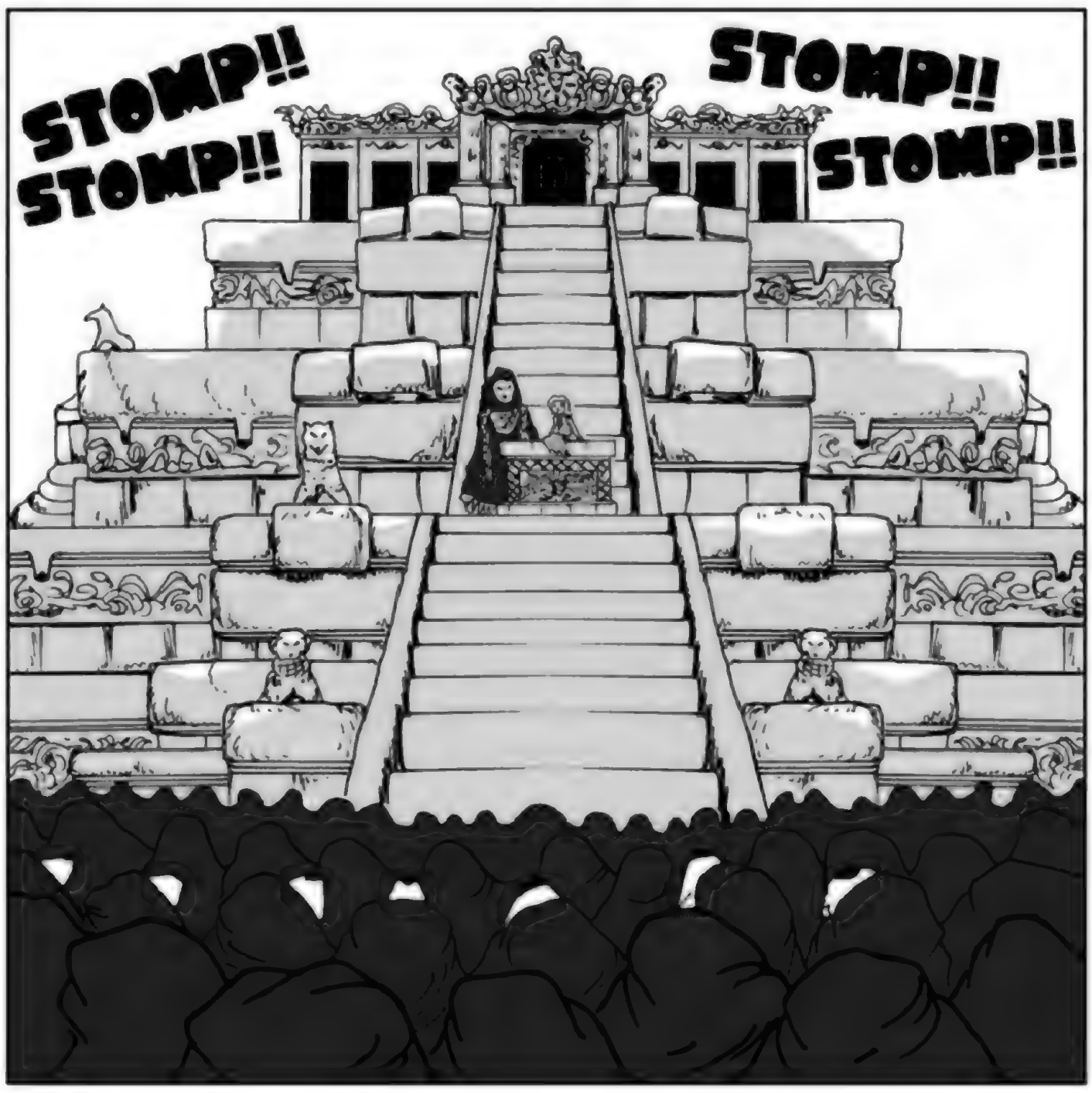

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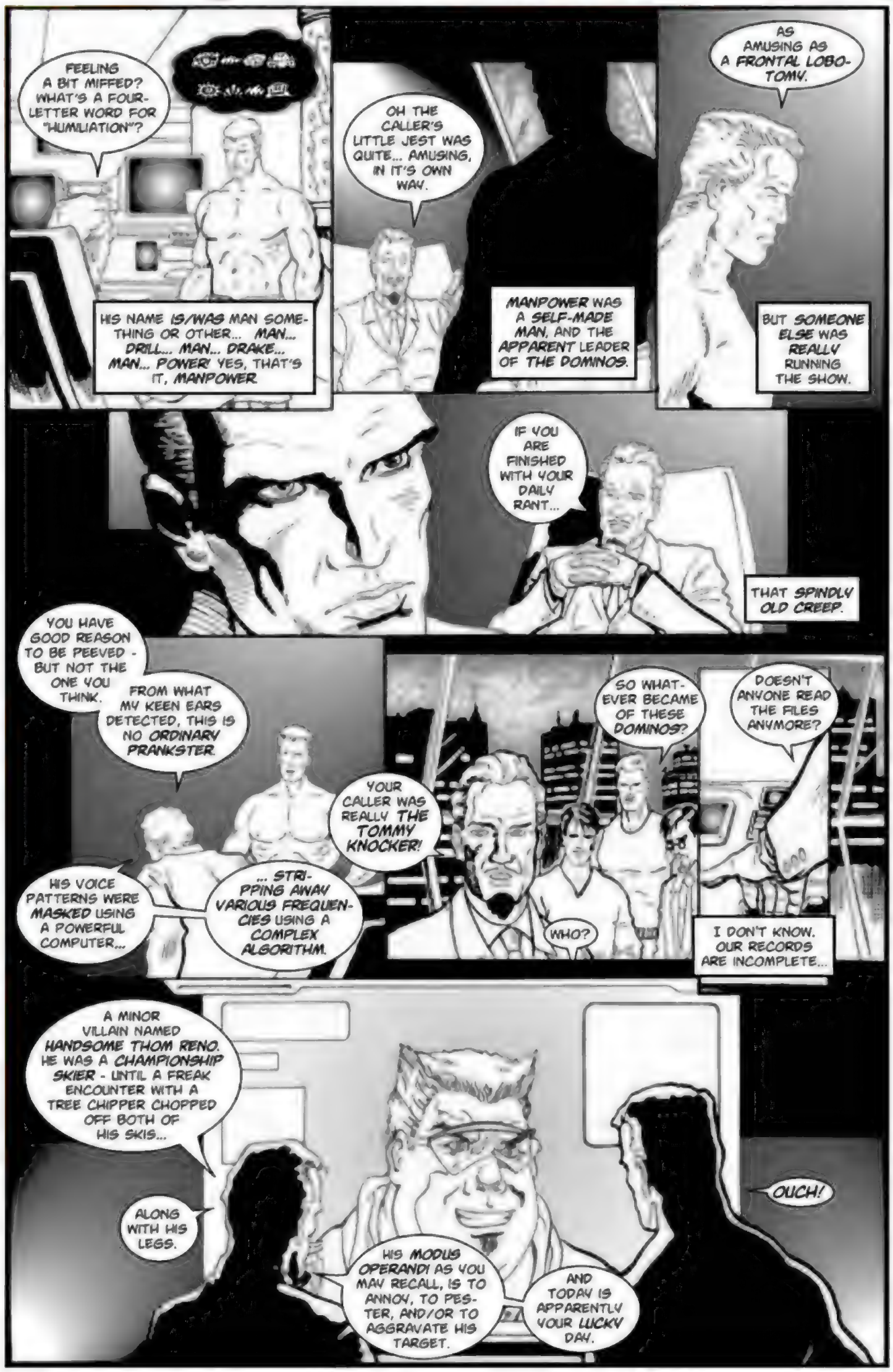
Bernard Kollie

Inks
Lee Stone


FEELING A BIT MIFFED? WHAT'S A FOUR-LETTER WORD FOR "HUMILIATION"?
HIS NAME IS/WAS MAN SOMETHING OR OTHER... MAN... DRILL... MAN... DRAKE... MAN... POWER! YES, THAT'S IT, MANPOWER.
OH THE CALLER'S LITTLE JEST WAS QUITE... AMUSING, IN IT'S OWN WAY.
MANPOWER WAS A SELF-MADE MAN, AND THE APPARENT LEADER OF THE DOMINOS.
AS AMUSING AS A FRONTAL LOBOTOMY.
BUT SOMEONE ELSE WAS REALLY RUNNING THE SHOW.
IF YOU ARE FINISHED WITH YOUR DAILY RANT...
THAT SPINDLY OLD CREEP.
YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE PEEVED - BUT NOT THE ONE YOU THINK.
FROM WHAT MY KEEN EARS DETECTED, THIS IS NO ORDINARY PRANKSTER.
HIS VOICE PATTERNS WERE MASKED USING A POWERFUL COMPUTER...
... STRIPPING AWAY VARIOUS FREQUENCIES USING A COMPLEX ALGORITHM.
YOUR CALLER WAS REALLY THE TOMMY KNOCKER!
SO WHATEVER BECAME OF THESE DOMINOS?
DOESN'T ANYONE READ THE FILES ANYMORE?
WHO?
I DON'T KNOW. OUR RECORDS ARE INCOMPLETE...
A MINOR VILLAIN NAMED HANDSOME THOM RENO. HE WAS A CHAMPIONSHIP SKIER - UNTIL A FREAK ENCOUNTER WITH A TREE CHIPPER CHOPPED OFF BOTH OF HIS SKIS...
ALONG WITH HIS LEGS.
HIS MODUS OPERANDI AS YOU MAY RECALL, IS TO ANNOY, TO PESTER, AND/OR TO AGGRAVATE HIS TARGET.
AND TODAY IS APPARENTLY YOUR LUCKY DAY.
OUCH!

SNEAK PEEK! DOMINOS

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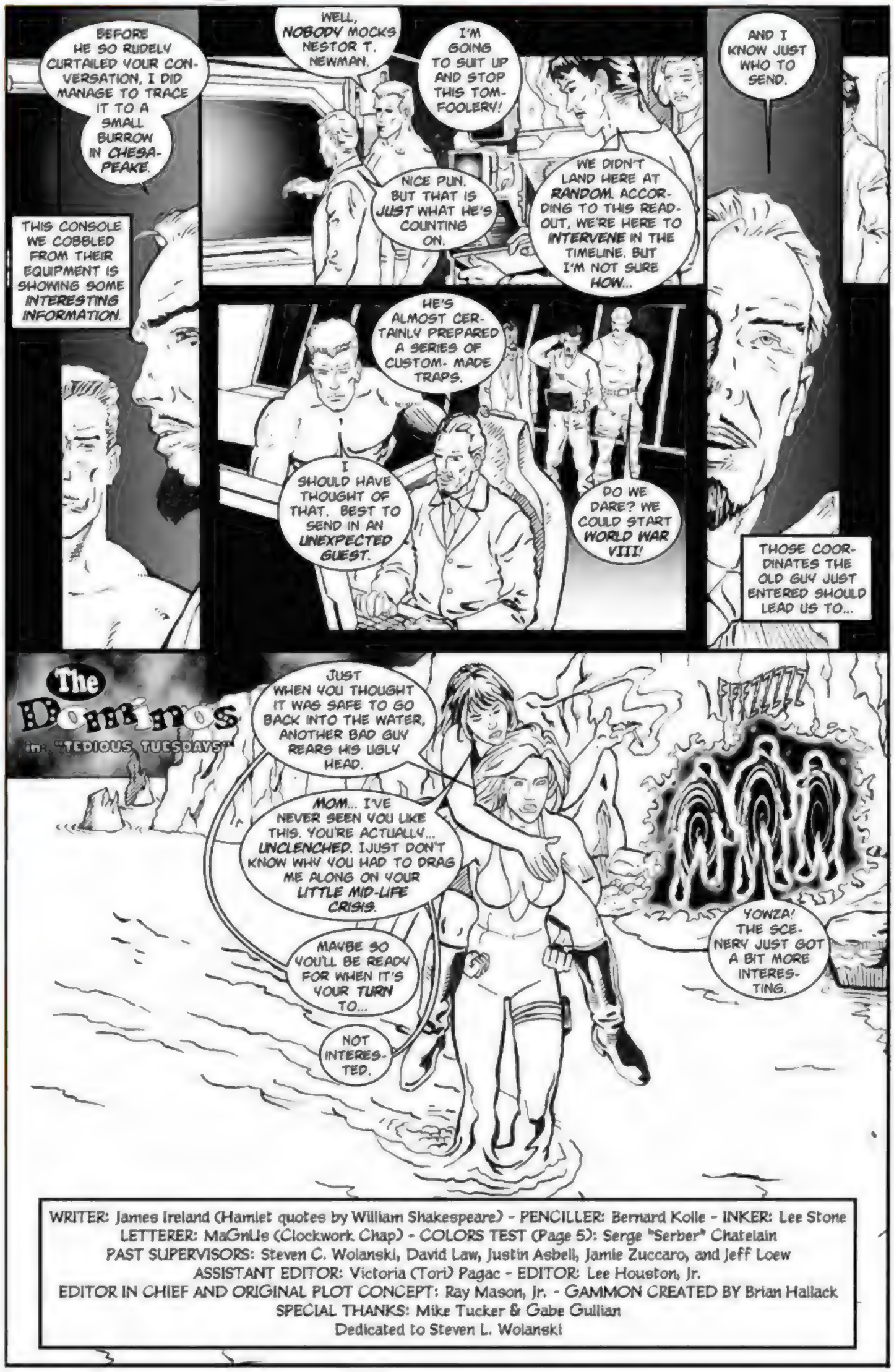
BEFORE HE SO RUDELY CURTAILED YOUR CONVERSATION, I DID MANAGE TO TRACE IT TO A SMALL BURROW IN CHESAPEAKE.
THIS CONSOLE WE COBBLED FROM THEIR EQUIPMENT IS SHOWING SOME INTERESTING INFORMATION.
WELL, NOBODY MOCKS NESTOR T. NEWMAN.
I'M GOING TO SUIT UP AND STOP THIS TOMFOOLERY!
NICE PUN. BUT THAT IS JUST WHAT HE'S COUNTING ON.
WE DIDN'T LAND HERE AT RANDOM. ACCORDING TO THIS READOUT, WE'RE HERE TO INTERVENE IN THE TIMELINE. BUT I'M NOT SURE HOW...
AND I KNOW JUST WHO TO SEND.
HE'S ALMOST CERTAINLY PREPARED A SERIES OF CUSTOM- MADE TRAPS.
I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT. BEST TO SEND IN AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.
DO WE DARE? WE COULD START WORLD WAR VIII!
THOSE COORDINATES THE OLD GUY JUST ENTERED SHOULD LEAD US TO...
The Dominos in: "TEDIOUS TUESDAYS"
JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GO BACK INTO THE WATER, ANOTHER BAD GUY REARS HIS UGLY HEAD.
MOM... I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU LIKE THIS. YOU'RE ACTUALLY... UNCLENCHED. I JUST DON'T KNOW WHY YOU HAD TO DRAG ME ALONG ON YOUR LITTLE MID-LIFE CRISIS.
MAYBE SO YOU'LL BE READY FOR WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN TO...
NOT INTERESTED.
FFFFFFFF
YOWZA! THE SCENERY JUST GOT A BIT MORE INTERESTING.

WRITER: James Ireland (Hamlet quotes by William Shakespeare) - PENCILLER: Bernard Kolle - INKER: Lee Stone
LETTERER: MaGnUs (Clockwork Chap) - COLORS TEST (Page 5): Serge "Serber" Chatelain
PAST SUPERVISORS: Steven C. Wolanski, David Law, Justin Asbell, Jamie Zuccaro, and Jeff Loew
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Victoria (Tori) Pagac - EDITOR: Lee Houston, Jr.
EDITOR IN CHIEF AND ORIGINAL PLOT CONCEPT: Ray Mason, Jr. - GAMMON CREATED BY Brian Hallack
SPECIAL THANKS: Mike Tucker & Gabe Gullian
Dedicated to Steven L. Wolanski

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'SIDES, I GOTTA STUDY THESE LINES FOR THIS HAMLET SCENE IN CLASS.
OPHELIA, HUH?
HOW'D YOU KNOW?
I'VE SEEN THE PLAY BEFORE, BUT IT'S ALWAYS OVERDONE.
IT'S A TRUE CLASSIC! AND I'LL PUT A BIT OF ME IN IT. BUT IT'S HARD PLAYING A VICTIM. THAT IS SO NOT ME!
IF MEMORY SERVES, THE OLDER ONE IS... CASCADE!
I JUST DON'T SEE WHY YOU ACT THE ADVENTURE INSTEAD OF LIVING IT.
NOT THIS LECTURE AGAIN.
SPARROW, DO NOT BE DISSIN' YOUR MOTHER.
YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN THE POWER TO CHANGE LIVES.
ALTHOUGH IF YOU KEEP SMOKING LIKE THAT DOUBT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO USE THEM.
WHATEVER WE HAVE TO DO, IT INVOLVES THESE TWO.
MOM, ALL THE COOL PEOPLE AT COLLEGE SMOKE.
SINCE WHEN HAS SMOKING EVER BEEN COOL?
CONSIDERING HOW MUCH TRAVELING WE'VE DONE ALREADY, CAN WE USE THAT MACHINE TO GET US HOME?
ARGH!
YIPES!
C'MON, SPARROW, DEFEND YOURSELF!
ON 2 DOUBLE-A BATTERIES?
IS THAT THE BEST YOU CAN DO?
THE BEST WE CAN DO IS SEND ONE OF US A FEW MINUTES INTO THE FUTURE TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS.
YOU COULD BARELY EVEN MAKE A RIPPLE!
DON'T CARE.
YOU BETTER GO, KEVIN. NEITHER OF US TRUSTS HARRIS.
OKAY. THE TRACKER'S GOT A LOCK ON SOMETHING... OR SOMEONE. WE'RE GOING DOWN.
Beep Beep Beep

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WHEN GAMMON SAID WE WERE HEADED FOR "A BURROW IN CHESAPEAKE" I DIDN'T THINK HE ACTUALLY MEANT A BURROW IN CHESAPEAKE!
THIS PLACE IS CREEPIER THAN MY AUDITION FOR HOOTERS.
YOUR...? NEVER MIND, I DON'T WANT TO KNOW.
KEEP ON YOUR TOES. THAT MADMAN COULD BE ANYWHERE DOWN HERE.
I'M NOT GOING IN.
WHAT?
WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, I WAS DROWNING GYPSY SHE-WOLVES.
WELL, I WANT A CAREER BEFORE I DIE!
THINK OF IT AS A CHARAC-TER STUDY. WHAT WOULD OPHELIA DO?
THAT'S NOT SUCH A BAD IDEA! THEN I CAN REALLY BECOME THE CHARACTER.
STEP INTO HER CORSET... OR WHATEVER.
GREAT. CAN WE GET GOING NOW?
LOOKS LIKE HE WAS EXPEC-TING MANPOWER AND PREPARED TO APPEAL TO HIS VANITY...
AND HIS HATRED OF ALL THINGS JUVENILE.
"I WAS THE MORE DECEIVED."
... AND MANPOWER'S IRRATIONAL FEAR OF MICE.
"AND I OF LADIES MOST DEJECT AND WRETCHED THAT SUCKED THE HONEY OF HIS..."

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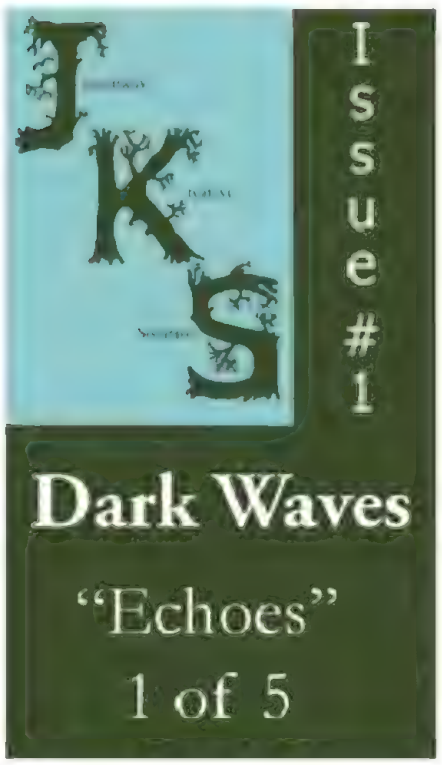
Artist
Thor Fjalarsson



DARK WAVES

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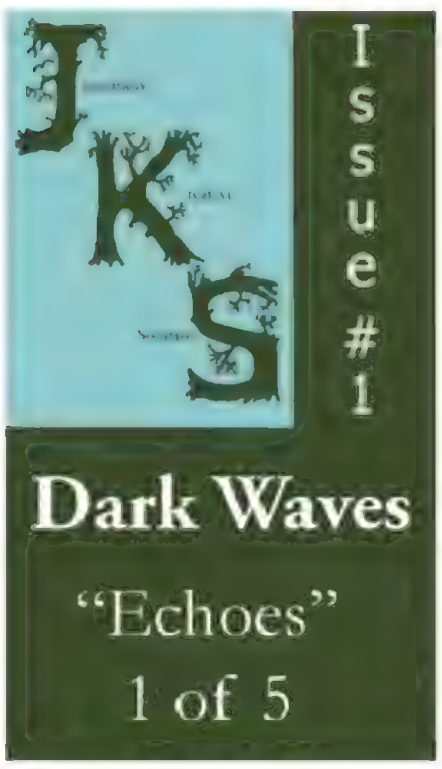

SEVEN YEARS AGO
WHY CAN'T YOU JUST WAIT ONE DAY?
I TOLD YOU, THESE INVESTORS WANT TO GET AN EARLY START. HYDRA-WEST ARE NOT THE KIND OF PEOPLE YOU ASK TO WAIT.
YOU'RE THE BEST DIVE SUPERVISOR WE HAVE. JUST TELL THEM THIS IS IMPORTANT. IF THEY ARE REALLY INTERESTED IN OUR RESEARCH THEY'LL UNDERSTAND.
CORPORATE TYPES UNDERSTAND NUMBERS AND TIMING. IF I CANNOT BE ON TIME FOR OUR MEETING, HOW CAN I CONVINCE THEM THAT I CAN RUN AN INSTITUTE?
BECAUSE YOU DO, BEN. YOU HAVE FOR THREE YEARS AND IT IS BECAUSE YOU ARE SO GOOD THAT THEY WANT YOU.
BUT NANCY...
NO "BUTS", BEN. I NEED YOU OUT THERE WITH ME.
YOU KNOW WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF CASH. THEY HAVE IT. THEY WANT TO SPEND IT.
IF I CANNOT CONVINCE THEM TO SPEND IT ON US, THERE ARE NOT GOING TO BE ANYMORE DIVES. DO YOU WANT THIS ONE TO BE YOUR LAST?

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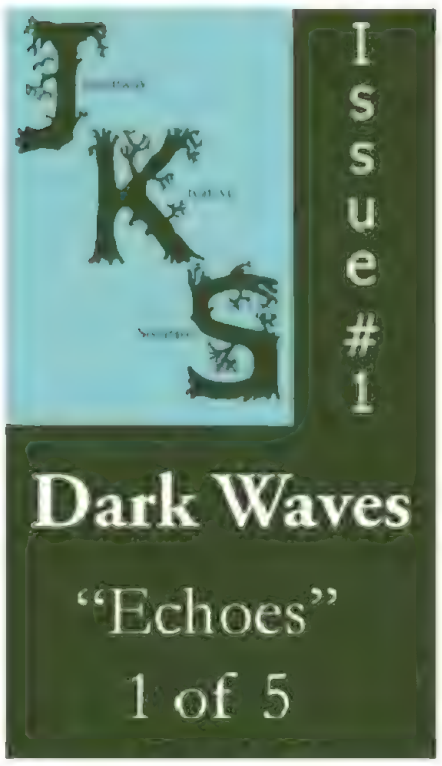

OF COURSE NOT.
NEITHER DO I. JUST GO THROUGH THE DRILLS LIKE EVERY OTHER TIME. HELL, WE TRIPLE CHECK EVERYTHING ANYWAY.
WE HAVE THE SAFEST BOATS ON THE WATER. IT IS GOING TO BE FINE.
I STILL WISH YOU WERE GOING TO BE THERE.
ME TOO, HONEY. BUT IF I DO NOT GO AND DO WELL FOR US, THERE IS NOT GOING TO BE ANYTHING LEFT OF OUR DREAMS.
JUST A COUPLE OF DAYS. THEN YOU CAN SHOW ME EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DISCOVERED.
DON'T BE LONG
AFTER ALL, I AM PAYING YOU A LOT. I EXPECT RESULTS.
HA
HA
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HA
HA

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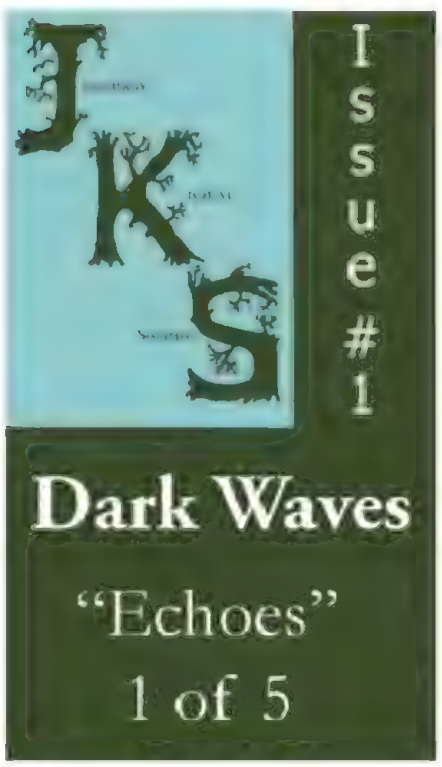
This Preview
brought to you by:

Writer
Arthur Gibson

Artist
Thor Fjalarsson



SNEAK PEEK!

WELCOME TO... THE ADVENTURES OF MAC AND TROUBLE

This Preview brought to you by:

Story
Rusty Gilligan
Phil Bledsoe

Artwork
Dan Gorman
Terry Pavlet

THE COMIC BOOK...
MAC AND TROUBLE PREVIEW PAGE 1
DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT, TROUBLE.
HOW DID HE KNOW?
HEY, MAC? YOU NOTICE ANYTHING WEIRD ABOUT THE LITTERBOX LATELY?
UH, WEIRD? THE LITTER-BOX? LIKE WHAT, TROUBLE?
IT WAS WAAAAY SMALLER TODAY, AND ROUND INSTEAD OF SQUARE, AND IT SMELLED REALLY FUNNY.
NOT BAD FUNNY BUT KINDA' GOOD FUNNY AND THE LITTER WAS ALL A WEIRD COLOR.
AND WAS THIS 'LITTERBOX' BY ANY CHANCE ON THE KITCHEN COUNTER...
...INSTEAD OF ITS USUAL SPOT IN THE BASEMENT, TROUBLE?
TROUBLE! THAT WAS A PLATE OF COUSCOUS!
THERE'S NO TWELVE-STEP PROGRAM FOR CATNIP, FOLKS.
AW, TROUBLE, DON'T YOU EVER FLUSH?
I SWEAR, IT'S LIKE LIVING WITH A DOG SOMETIMES.
WHAT WAS THAT? THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE IN...
AEEEERE!

THIS IS IT... THIS IS OFFICIALLY WHERE MAC AND TROUBLE BEGIN THEIR ADVENTURES ! PLEASE ENJOY THIS 3-PAGE PREVIEW FROM THE OPENING OF THEIR #1 ISSUE...

SNEAK PEEK!

WELCOME TO...

THE ADVENTURES OF MAC AND TROUBLE

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MAC AND TROUBLE PREVIEW PAGE 2

TROUBLE! THROW ME A ROPE!
OK, MAC, RIGHT AWAY!
HERE YA GO, MAC.
UMMM...
THANKS.
I WAS HOPING YOU'D THROW THE ROPE DOWN TO ME AND HAUL ME UP... NOW WE'RE BOTH STUCK HERE.
OOOOOH... HEY, YEAH!

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WELCOME TO... THE ADVENTURES OF MAC AND TROUBLE

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MAC AND TROUBLE PREVIEW PAGE 3

Sneak Peek!

This Preview brought to you by:

Story
Mark McCracken

Artwork
Eduardo Savid

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Several Weeks Later.
Raymond Vendel met the girl of his dreams one fateful night, when he happened to be in the right place at the right time...
...to rescue her from a pack of vampires.
But dreams are often crushed by harsh reality.
After spending the night with this girl, Selena, and a wild night it was, she chose to leave it at that. One wild night.
Ray has known a lot of women in his time, even if they didn't know him.
Selena had ignited real emotion in him, and he wasn't about to give up on her so easily.
So, he decided to follow her home. He just wanted to at least learn where she lived, but even that led to another course of events.
After coming to her aid once more, Ray was rewarded another chance to hopefully win over Selena's affection. But all too soon, he found his dreams crushed again.
Midnight Warriors
Writer: Mark McCracken
Artist: Eduardo Savid
I'm really sorry. I just don't see this working out.

Sneak Peek!

Midnight Warriors

This Preview brought to you by:

Story
Mark McCracken

Artwork
Eduardo Savid

I'm a very complicated person, and I just don't think I can handle dealing with everything else on top of my own issues. It seems you're very obsessed with your 'hobby' and I don't know that you can give it up without falling back into it. And since your attention used to be divided over so many women, I don't know if I could ever feel like I was enough for you...
Don't say that, Selena. The girls in those pictures, they mean nothing to me. I'll get rid of all of my stuff. I won't even look at another girl in that way again. I mean it when I say I only have eyes for you. You are the first person in such a long time that I really care about. I've kept my distance from the world, but now I really want to let you in.
Ray, it isn't just your voyeuristic pleasures. I'm also a little freaked that you were following me. I want to know that I don't have eyes watching my every move.
Then I won't. I promise I won't. Just give me a chance.
Ever since we met, I've felt a connection to you, I admit that. At first, I shunned the idea you actually cared about me. Then, when I decided this could be something more, I've been plagued by all of these negative thoughts about us. I don't want to rush into something right now, and dragging you along I'll only end up hurting you.

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Sneak Peek!

Midnight Warriors

This Preview brought to you by:

Story
Mark McCracken

Artwork
Eduardo Savid

I'm going to go now and I don't want you to follow me.
Never.
Now, Ray finds himself here. Back to what he does best, watching.
He breaks his promise, but doesn't intend to intervene. He hopes his presence will go unnoticed.
He knows he needs to move on. He can't just wait for her, but he also can't let her go.
Again, fate steps in to make it a little easier on him.

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Sneak Peek!

Midnight Warriors

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Story
Mark McCracken

Artwork
Eduardo Savid

His heart drops. Already he feels that Selena has moved on, and as a free woman she will explore her options.
And why would she settle for something damaged?
As Ray watches he sees how she instantly bonds with this new guy, much the same way they fell for eachother all too recently.
It makes him wonder if maybe they're both pawns. That Selena just uses men and moves on to the next. But he won't beleive that load of crap for a second. He's seen her true colors.
But, he can't watch her with another man, it's too painful. This situation is out of his control and he isn't about to force his way back into her life.
The Rusty Trail club

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Midnight Warriors

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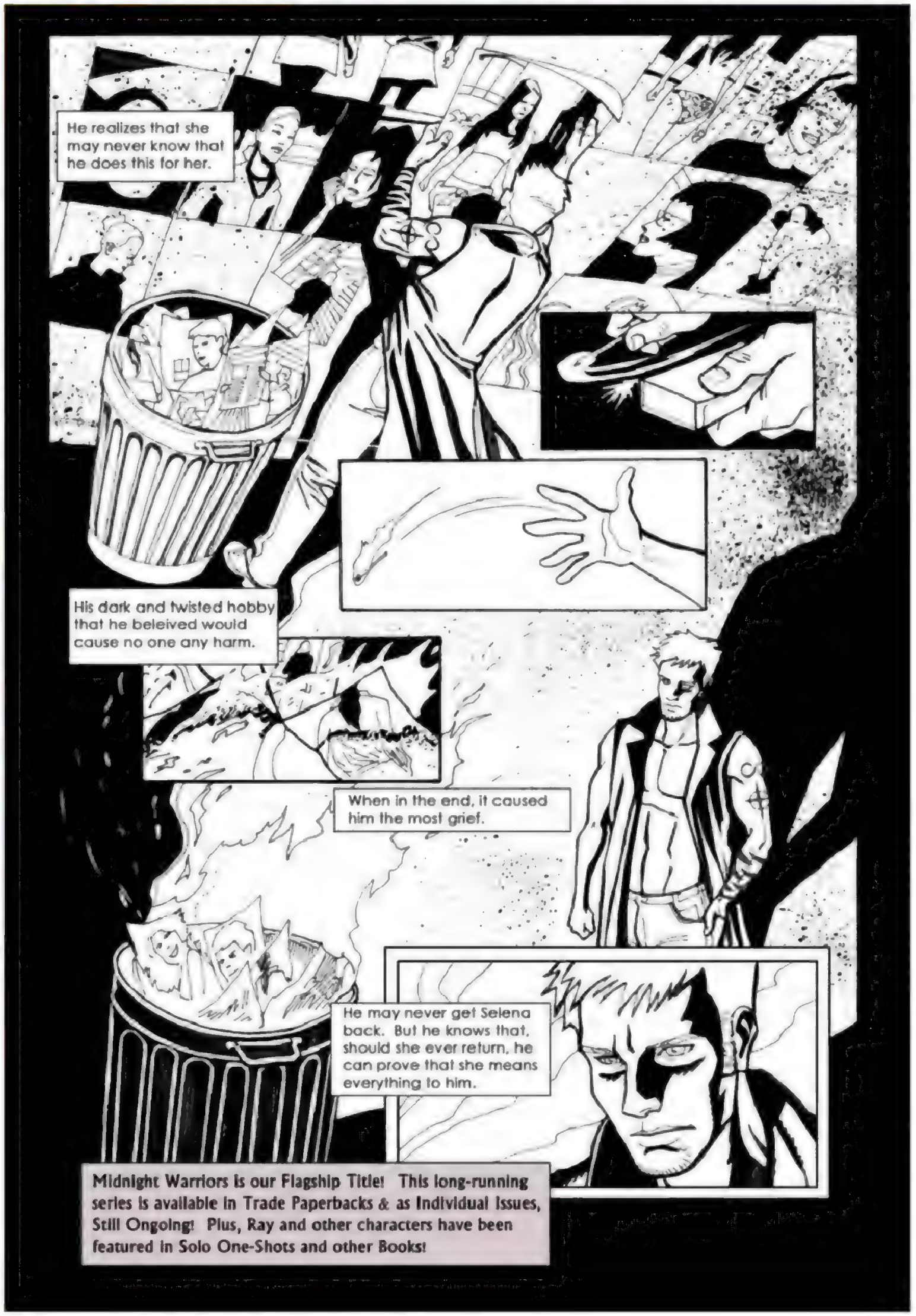
He realizes that she may never know that he does this for her.
His dark and twisted hobby that he beleived would cause no one any harm.
When in the end, it caused him the most grief.
He may never get Selena back. But he knows that, should she ever return, he can prove that she means everything to him.
Midnight Warriors is our Flagship Title! This long-running series is available in Trade Paperbacks & as Individual Issues, Still Ongoing! Plus, Ray and other characters have been featured in Solo One-Shots and other Books!

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REFLECTIONS

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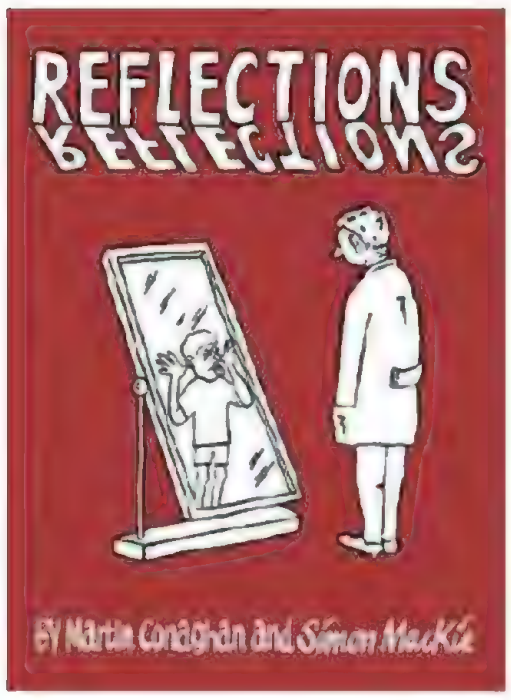
And

Simon Mackie



Monopoly on sleep

IN THE MID 1990'S I WORKED AT A COMMUNITY PROJECT FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS
MORBY'S
EACH RESIDENT LIVED IN A SHARED APARTMENT IN A LARGE TENEMENT BLOCK WITH ONE OTHER PERSON
NATSBY
TOBLER
AT NIGHT TIME ALL THE RESIDENTS WENT TO BED IN THEIR OWN APARTMENTS AND STAFF OFTEN WENT TO SLEEP ON THE COMMUNAL AREA SOFAS UNLESS THEY WERE CALLED UPON FOR ASSISTANCE
ONCE A WEEK I WORKED WITH ANOTHER STAFF NURSE CALLED BRIAN. HE WAS VERY DILLIGENT ABOUT HIS DUTIES AND DIDN'T LIKE TO SLEEP ON THE JOB.
HE OFTEN BROUGHT IN VIDEOS FOR US TO WATCH DURING THE NIGHT - SOMETIMES HE TURNED THE SOUND DOWN ON THE T.V AND PROVIDED HIS OWN COMMENTARY
I WANT YOU NOW BRIAN!
SORRY, KIM BUT I'M MARRIED TO MY JOB
BRIAN ALSO LIKED BOARD GAMES
HEY MARTIN, WANNA PLAY MONOPOLY?
I HATE MONOPOLY
AW, C'MON, MATE. I'VE NO ONE ELSE TO PLAY WITH
O.K, JUST THIS ONCE
MONOPOLY
SO I PLAYED THE GAME WITH HIM AND ENDED UP BUYING ALL THE PROPERTIES AND TAKING ALL OF BRIAN'S MONEY
AS THE GAME WORE ON I FELL ASLEEP. BRIAN CONTINUED PLAYING, THROWING THE DICE FOR MY TURNS AND MAKING DECISIONS FOR ME
OH DEAR! I LANDED ON YOUR HOTEL YOU'RE NOT GOING TO RENT ME? O.K! WHAT'S THAT? YOU WANT TO SELL IT TO ME? O.K - VERY WELL - IF YOU INSIST
THE NEXT MORNING
HEY EVERYBODY! I BEAT MARTIN AT MONOPOLY LAST NIGHT. HE WAS RUBBISH!
ROTA MANAGER
PLEASE, CAN YOU MAKE SURE I NEVER WORK WITH BRIAN AGAIN

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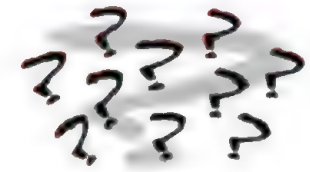

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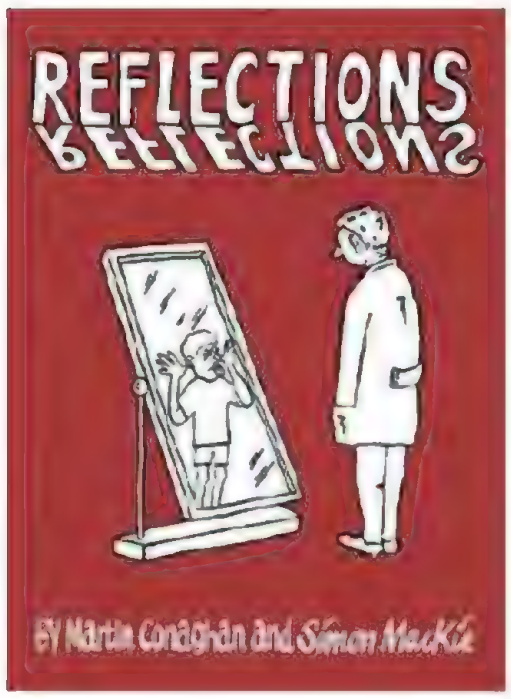

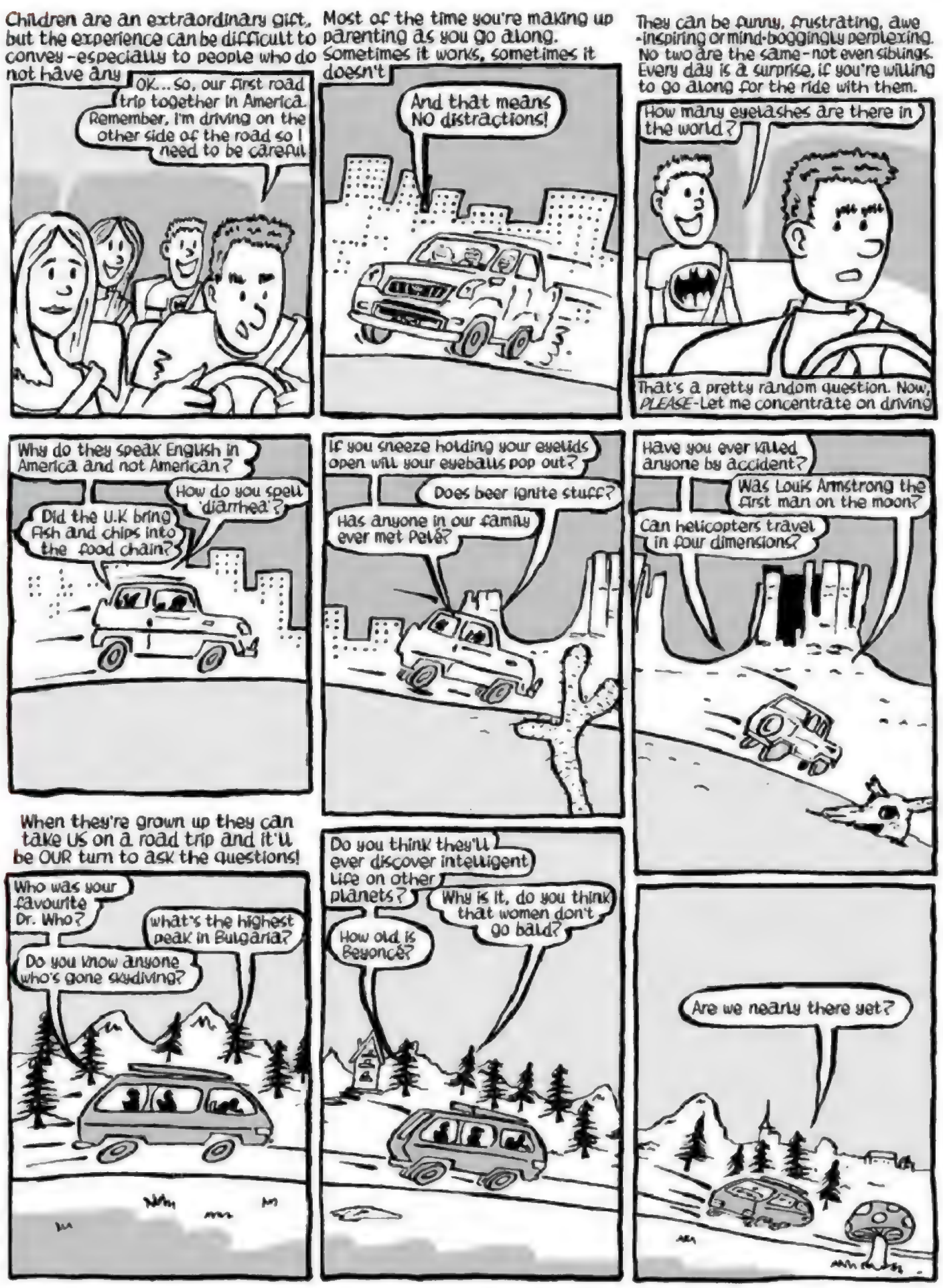
Children are an extraordinary gift, but the experience can be difficult to convey - especially to people who do not have any
OK... So, our first road trip together in America. Remember, I'm driving on the other side of the road so I need to be careful
Most of the time you're making up parenting as you go along. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't
And that means NO distractions!
They can be funny, frustrating, awe-inspiring or mind-boggingly perplexing. No two are the same - not even siblings. Every day is a surprise, if you're willing to go along for the ride with them.
How many eyelashes are there in the world?
That's a pretty random question. Now, PLEASE - Let me concentrate on driving
Why do they speak English in America and not American?
How do you spell 'diarrhea'?
Did the U.K bring fish and chips into the food chain?
If you sneeze holding your eyelids open will your eyeballs pop out?
Does beer ignite stuff?
Has anyone in our family ever met Pelé?
Have you ever killed anyone by accident?
Was Louis Armstrong the first man on the moon?
Can helicopters travel in four dimensions?
When they're grown up they can take US on a road trip and it'll be OUR turn to ask the questions!
Who was your favourite Dr. Who?
What's the highest peak in Bulgaria?
Do you know anyone who's gone skydiving?
Do you think they'll ever discover intelligent life on other planets?
How old is Beyoncé?
Why is it, do you think that women don't go bald?
Are we nearly there yet?

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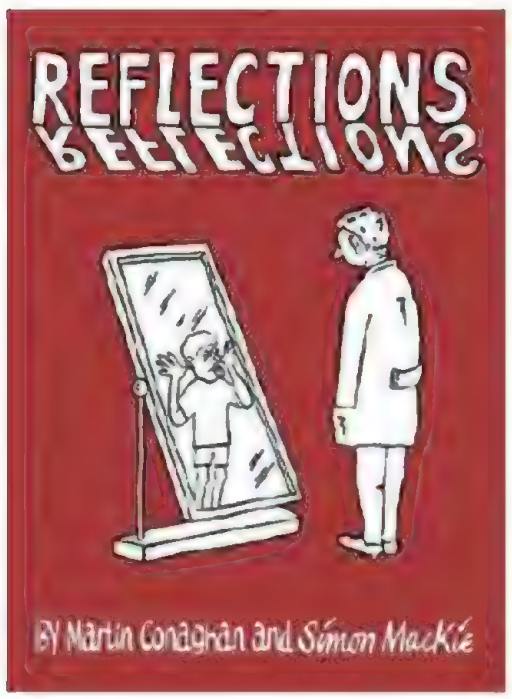


REFLECTIONS

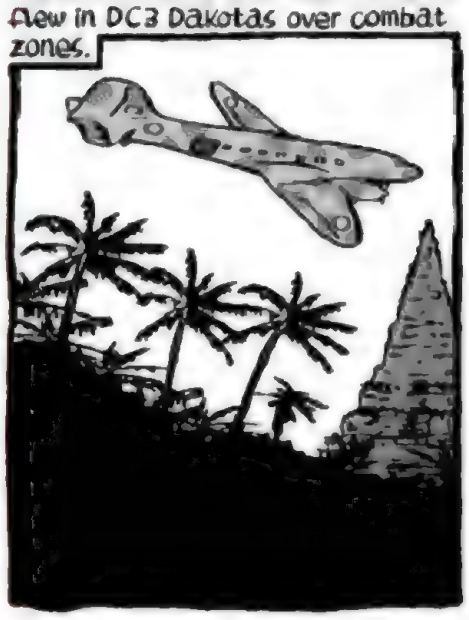
Willie John Farrell, my maternal grandad, served in the Royal Air Force as an auxiliary aircraftman during World War II.

He was stationed in Burma.

He often told us stories from his time in the jungle - like how he would take the mick out of the new recruits when they would arrive - pale as the driven snow.

And the time when one of his fellow airmen went to bunk down and down and unfurled his blanket only to find a coiled up hose pipe pop out to greet him.

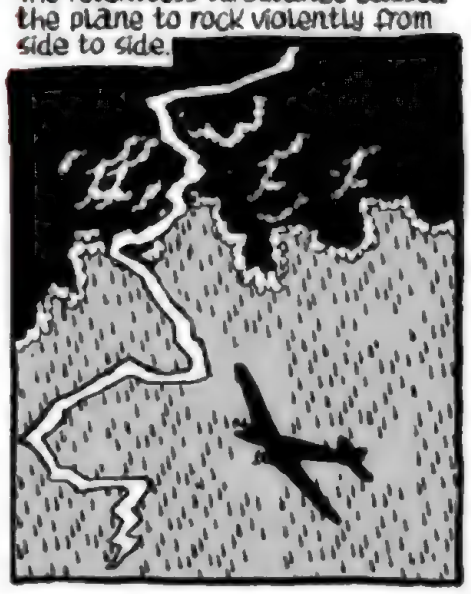
He was a supply drop man and he flew in DC3 Dakotas over combat zones.



He and his comrades pushed out massive pallets of supplies that parachuted down on to drop-zones marked DZ.

And on one occasion he flew into a terrible storm.

The relentless turbulance caused the plane to rock violently from side to side.



As pallets were flung out of the plane one of the airmen got his leg caught up in some rope that was attached to a pallet. He nearly went out with the crate.

It was my Grandad who saved him at that moment by risking his own life preventing his comrade from falling out of the tail section.

SNEAK PEEK!

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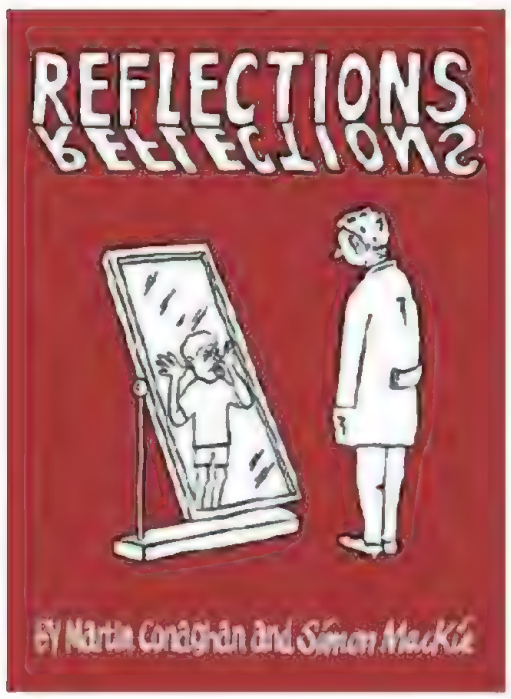

9/11
On the morning of September 11th, 2001 I got up at around 6.15 am and shaved
I was picked up at 7.15 am by a taxi and taken to Glasgow airport
Caught flight 218 bound for London
Robbie Coltrane sat one seat behind me
The chair of the meeting made his apologies for arriving late that morning
Sorry I'm so late - I've been glued to footage of a plane crashing into the World Trade Centre in New York City - Simply terrible!
We started the meeting but soon it was interrupted by the news that the World Trade Centre had been struck by another plane and both towers had collapsed entirely - all as a result of terrorism
I quickly became worried that London could be a target and I wanted to get back to my pregnant wife in Glasgow as soon as possible
On the London Underground a man was reading The London Evening Standard depicting the disaster on its front page
SPORT
EVENING STANDARD
US AT TACKLE
He looked at me in despair and I almost puked
After a considerable delay I returned home at around 10pm
Robbie Coltrane was sitting next to me on the flight home
I sat up late into the night watching the coverage and surfing the net
It was around 4 am before I eventually fell asleep
I e-mailed a scan to my American friend, Nancy, of our unborn baby with a note:
I wanted you to know that there is still hope in the world.
M
It cheered up her spirits and ever since I've regularly sent her updates of Jake's progress

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Starter for Ten

In 1983 my Dad, Gerry, appeared on a popular TV quiz show
SALE OF THE CENTURY
A font of all knowledge and facts, he believed he had a great chance of making it on to the show and applied for the trials
Who was the first person to climb Mount Everest?
Sir Edmund Hillary!
He was successful and was called to record the quiz with host, Nicholas Parsons and two female contestants
AND NOW, FROM NORWICH, IT'S THE QUIZ OF THE WEEK!
The object of Sale of the Century was simple: three contestants were asked a series of quick-fire questions to earn money, buzzing if they knew the answers
What is Dora?
Diesel, oil
Bzzzzzzz!
JOY
GERARD
MAUREEN
55
55
40
At various intervals in the show they could purchase mystery 'sale' items or hold on to their winnings for a 'shopping' spree at the end.
This state of the art Betamax Stereo Video cassette recorder is worth £960
A television appearance was a big deal in those days - and the whole town knew my dad would be on the quiz
Alright, Martin! Did I hear your Dad is going to be on 3-2-1 with Dusty Bin?
No, it's 'Sale of the Century'
I knew the result in advance and I remember being upset when I heard that he hadn't won
Martin - Your Mum just phoned - your Dad came in second
However, during the quiz he purchased an electric typewriter and won £80 in cash - Quite a haul
The next day in school I arrived at the gates and the whole playground was whistling the theme tune to the show
But I wrote my first ever story on that that typewriter along with numerous interviews and articles for magazines and comics
To this day people still mention my dad's 15 minutes of fame
Martin - wasn't your dad once on 'Bullseye?'
Sigh!

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Daniel Horn is writing articles and conducting thoughtful, in-depth interviews for SP!

Contact him at:
daniel.horn1128 @gmail.com

THE LAST GREAT AMERICAN SALESMAN

a short story by

Daniel Nathan Horn

Soon, the tumescent sun began sinking piecemeal, a slow, celestial shipwreck, into the roiling surf of a high temperature air mass. Evening lengthened shadows and cooled blacktop. The soft sounds of the gentle swells breaking on the shore was carried from the West on sea-salt winds.

"Mark my words," Carlo was saying. "We're both going to be glad we stayed behind. Can you imagine the ordeal people are going to have to go through to get back here? It's going to be just as bad as the evacuation. Maybe worse."

They were sitting on the couch, drinking whiskey from paper cups. Carlo had always kept a handle of whiskey in one of his desk drawers, the deep one near the bottom. John did not offer a reply. He closed his eyes, easing into his buzz. He must have dozed off for a moment, because he was surprised at the sound of the door squealing open and Carlo sounding off a salutation.

"How's it going, kid?"

John sat forward, rubbing his eyes. He squinted at the customer that had just come in. It was a teenage boy, scrawny and somber, dressed in mostly black.

"Hey, alright," the teenager answered. "I was wondering if I could take a look at the Corvette you guys have out there." He was referring to the burgundy 2002 convertible displayed prominently at the edge of the lot, facing the road.

"You interested in buying?" Carlo countered. "I don't just let people take the 'Vette for a joy ride if they're not buying."

"Yeah, I want to buy it. I've got, like, eight hundred dollars for a down payment."

"Down payment?" the manager scoffed. "You've got to be kidding me. You saw the sign outside, right? 'End of the World?' We're not financing anymore, kid. You buy, you fly. That's the way it works on the last day of existence."

"How about fifty to test drive it?" the kid riposted, quickly.

"Shit, you even know how to drive stick?"

"Yeah, I learned how to drive on a manual." The teenager stuck his chin out, displaying his impetuous confidence.

"Listen, kid," Carlo returned, waving his hands in the air. "I can't do anything for you. If I let you take the 'Vette out and someone else stops by wanting to buy it, I'm screwed. Sorry."

"Whatever. Fuck this." The boy turned and stormed from the shop.

"Kids these days, right?" Carlo aimed the question at John, but John was staring pensively at the door as it slammed shut behind the kid. John stood, opened the door.

"John? You OK?" Carlo asked, his brow furrowed concernedly.

Without responding, John stepped outside, and looked around, trying hard to find the boy dressed in black in the night. Finally, John spotted him, crossing the street. The teenager was heading toward the bus stop. John followed. The adolescent took a seat on the bus stop bench. He noticed John approaching, and quickly looked away.

"Hey. I'm John," the car salesman asserted, holding a hand out for a shake.

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When the boy didn't move to complete the gesture, John produced a flattened pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. "Want a smoke?"

"Sure," the teenager said, not bothering to look up. He pulled a crooked cigarette from the pack and placed it between his lips.

"What's your name?" John asked, lighting the boy's cigarette.

"Dylan."

"Nice to meet you, Dylan."

"What's up that douche bag's ass?" Dylan abruptly snarled.

"Carlo? Yeah, I'm sorry about that. He's really a good guy--just a little too businesslike sometimes."

"Yeah, I'm sure he's a real class act." This response was followed by a roll of the eyes and a long drag of tobacco smoke.

"Yeah, well, when I was a kid, my mom had a lot of problems," John reasoned. "Carlo dated her for a little while, and, when she died, I had to move in with my dad. Carlo always kept in touch, gave me money, helped me with school. Damn well did a better job raising me than my dad did." John put a cigarette between his own lips and lit it, adding afterward, "He actually gave me this job right after high school. Been working here since."

The two stood in uncomfortable silence for a moment. Then, John spoke again, changing the subject. "So, where are your parents at, Dylan?"

"I was living with my aunt and uncle actually. They headed inland a week ago."

"You didn't go with?"

Dylan shook his head. "I told them I'd be leaving the coast with my girlfriend the next day, but after they left, I just threw a big party at their place with all my friends, every night. But each night, the parties got smaller and smaller--until this morning. I woke up alone." Dylan winced as if he'd told a terrible lie and felt instantaneous guilt for it. "Well, not really alone. There were, like, three kids I didn't really know still crashing in my living room. But all my friends were gone. They all pussed out, went inland."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen. I was going to be eighteen in four months."

"Oh, eighteen's a big one," John said with a grin. "Any crazy plans for your birthday?"

"I wanted to go to a titty bar, but it looks like that's not going to happen now. Guess I'll never get to experience having big, fake boobs rubbed all over my face."

John laughed. "Sometimes those big, fake boobs aren't all they're cracked up to be. Tell you what, on your birthday I will personally take you to as many titty bars as you want. I'll be like your titty tour chauffeur. I mean, I'm sure, come tomorrow, all this will have worked itself out."

Dylan looked up, into the distance, down the empty street. "I don't know. I know people overreact all the time to the shit they see on TV, but not everyone--not like this."

John pursed his lips and nodded. Smoke from their cigarettes pirouetted in the darkness, hanging in the solemn silence between "now" and "the end." John glanced up and down the street.

"I haven't seen a bus go by here all day," he said at length. "Did you walk here?"

"Yeah."

"Where do you live?"

"By Magg Park."

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John scratched his chin. "South. Traffic shouldn't be too bad going that way. Listen, I'm going to go back in and talk to Carlo about getting the keys to the Corvette--"

"Nah, you don't have to do that," Dylan interjected.

"I'm going to get the keys and give you a lift home," John continued, smiling warmly. "When we're a block away, I'll let you drive. Sound good?"

#

The convertible rumbled to a halt in Carlo's lot. John emerged from the car and took a few minutes to admire the stillness and tranquility. He heard the scream of fireworks, launched by someone on the beach. The rockets carved glittering swaths through the night sky before bursting at their zeniths, a cascade of bright sparks. This doesn't feel like the end, he thought. It was nearly midnight.

When John entered the office, Carlo didn't bother acknowledging his return. He was stuffing cash into the small metal safe in the closet. John could tell by his supervisor's reticence that Carlo felt a bit betrayed by his young protégé. John had taken that kid out in the one car he would have liked to have kept on the lot. It was a talking point if nothing else. He couldn't stop thinking about the possibility that someone had driven past the lot, looking for a Corvette, and, not seeing one, simply passed by.

John sat on the couch and could hear Carlo muttering to himself when the lights went out. Carlo bumped his head on one shelves in the closet and cursed loudly.

"Power's out," John stated.

"No kidding," Carlo hissed.

John heard the safe secure with a heavy clank. Carlo came out, rubbing the top of his head and still muttering under his breath. He stumbled around in the dark, finally finding his desk and brought out the bottle of whiskey again.

"Well, this is it. It's almost midnight, the ball's about to drop, happy New Year," he was saying as he poured himself a drink. He seemed to finally be coming to terms with the loss of his hypothetical sale. "You should stay here tonight. Who knows what kind of crazy looting and shit is going on out there? Bicycle's probably not appropriate for traversing the apocalypse."

"You know, if this is the end, it wouldn't have mattered if you had given that kid the car," John said bluntly.

"Jesus Christ," Carlo groaned. "You serious?"

"I don't know." And he repeated absently, "I don't know."

"Listen," get some rest. Take a nap. The world's still going to be here when you wake up. And if it's not, you won't know any different." He chuckled, but the laugh quickly trailed off as he noticed John didn't find his observation quite as amusing. Carlo swirled his whiskey in that paper cup, raised it in a silent toast, and knocked it back, exhaling emphatically after swallowing.

#

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT ISSUE!

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www.jasonofnyc.com

REVIEWS!

Policy: Dimestore will print reviews from just about any source, that are available at any source they care to list with us. It is our hope you will then get an idea if a book is worth pursuing, and indeed, go out of your way to get it. Our review system is managed online, so if you want anything reviewed, you will need to at least be able to send an e-mail...although our reviewers are authorized to collect things for review in person. Dimestore reviewers should have CARDS or copies of SP! to show that they are indeed who they say they are. Our reviewers are instructed to be reviewing for the READER, not the CREATOR...so we are sorry if a reviewer does not give a review that would boost your sales. Reviewers are ranked and given clout by reader votes online, and we won't print reviews for long from someone who people aren't finding their reviews useful. That said, we also instruct our reviewers to give constructive feedback and not be mean. Everyone starts somewhere, and SP! Is set up to be one of the first places a publisher may get a real review.

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Dreadlocked Ninja Publishing
***Kulprit* TBP**

100pg Graphic Novel, B+W w/color cover. First Printing, 2009. By Kevin Darmanie.

$14.95. Order at: http://www.amazon.com/Kulprit-Kevin-Darmanie/dp/0615308341/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1336186217&sr=8-1

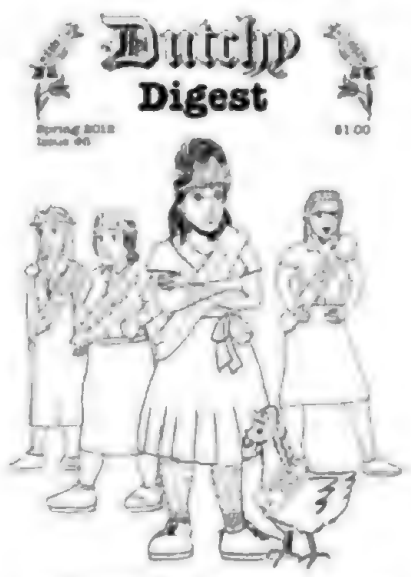
Dreadlocked Ninja Publishing, however, seems to be gone.

Review: I feel kinda sad that the website links in this book are dead, and it took a lot of effort to find any current information on Kevin and this book. I did find it still available through Amazon, so that's something. I have been a fan of Kulprit since its days as a small press digest. They even quoted my reviews of it on this—I think—reworked/improved collection.

The larger size allowed Kevin to fix a lot in here I think, and I'm pretty sure it was completely re-lettered, although I can't say for sure without finding the small press versions. Anyway, what we get here is a very meaty read that follows the "Hero," Kulprit—from decent guy who saves people and turns bad guys over to the police... to vigilante who kills the worst bad guys he comes across. The artwork is moodily dark, but well-drawn, with solid body structure and backgrounds that matter. In the story, some of the exposition does become a little redundant, but we have to remember this is a collection of a six-issue series. Other than that, this work has stood the test of time well, and while I fear the publisher of this edition is gone, I hope the e-mail I found for Kevin will work, or that Darrell Goza (who edited this work. and who I know is still around) can forward the review to him, and we find out if there is anything new in the works from this very talented creator.

Is this worth seeking out!? Absolutely. Go out of your way to get a-hold of this; it's a classic. —Ian

Dutchy Digest
Dutchy Digest #6



The Case of the Pageant of Peril

12pg Digest size, B+W. First printing, Spring 2012. By Steven Hager, Dave Sobkoiak, and Bruce Rosenberger.

Available at: http://www.dutchydigest.com/

In this issue of *Dutchy Digest*, we follow our main character, Dingledorffer, to the Schnitzelville Farm show. After a mysterious threat is written in butter (of all things), Digledorffer must go undercover and enter the beauty pageant to discover who it is!

Review: This was an interesting read... it had its high points and low points.

As fun as it was to just jump into a "county fair"-type setting, as I was reading it, I began to question some of the main character's choices. Why was it necessary for him to enter the beauty contest in order to unravel who wrote the threat in butter? In fact, the only reason he found out who did it was because after the contest was over... the crown was stolen by our villain!

Regardless, there were some parts that made me

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(Continued from page 68)

chuckle a little. And the artwork played out for the type of story that was being told. The lettering could use some polishing; it tended to take some attention away from the artwork.

Dutchy Digest: The Case of the Pageant of Peril was worth the couple minutes it took to read, and if you are looking for a story where the biggest threat isn't mass terrorism or nuclear fallout– but simply a county fair gone wrong, this is worth picking up. —Mike

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Freestyle Komics
***Hotshot*—Remix #1**

40pg Full Size comic, Full color with B+W pages. First Printing, 2009. By Victor Dandridge, and Mike Watson.

Best chance to track them down: http://freestyle-komics.blogspot.com/

Review: I'm not having much luck on my reviews today! I keep picking comics that I can't find any active online place to connect them to. I'm not sure when I got this book, I was assuming in person at SPACE, but I am not sure any of the websites or emails I can find for the creator work. I only found one blogspot, which hasn't been updated since May, 2011. Anyway…

Printing grayscaled B+W art in full color tends to give it added depth and vibrancy. It's more expensive to print, but lets you run full color ads throughout the book, which is what they've done here. While possibly paying for the nicer printing, the ads break the flow of the comic. It would have been a better decision to put ads before and after the main strip, not cut into it. I also have to note that the pages were not sized properly to the trim of the book, and there are a number of mistakes, such as page tilting, and having a border on three sides of the page, but leaving the outside edge cut with a bleed, which is just sloppy production work.

The artwork is a little sporadic; it's got good parts and awkward parts. Overall, you feel like you are being thrown around—like the hero is for most of the comic. Story-wise, that's about what you get. There is some attempt to add back story and character interaction, but for most of the issue, it's a fight scene.

So what do I say about this book? Is it worth tracking it down? I note from the website that there are more issues to the series, so it does make me curious to see if the work improves, but… as for suggesting to you to go seeking for it, based on this book.. Let's see what else is in my box… —Ian

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Grim Rascal
***Homemade Heroes* #1**

20pg, standard sized, created and published by Grim Rascal.

$2.00. Order from Grim.Rascal@hotmail.co.uk

Review: With Great Power comes Great Stupidity!

This is the motto of *Homemade Heroes* #1 by Grim Rascal, a collection of strips set in a common universe, where the theme is, "Just because you have super powers does not mean you have super intellect." I say "strips," because the majority of the book is set out as if it were a collection of newspaper comic strips, with each strip having a separate punch line. The art is excellent and the characters—especially the smug superhero, Captain Smarmy—are quite funny. The writing is hit-and-miss, but because there are many strips in this issue, at least some of them will appeal to everyone. Best of all, Grim Rascal provides contact information and sounds open for reader feedback—and even collaboration. Give this one a try! —Carson

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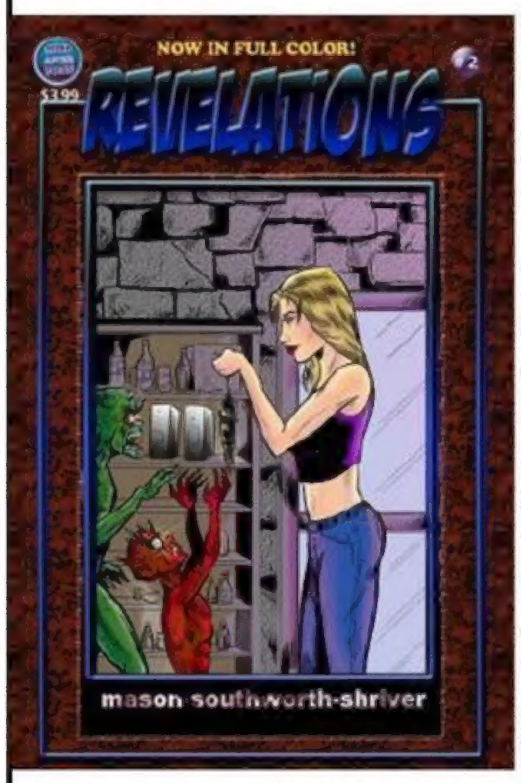
Here After Press
***Revelations* #2**



25pg, full colour, standard size.

$3.99. Can be ordered from www.comixpress.com

Review: This is the second issue of the series, and a continuation of the first. However, this issue includes an extremely well-written recap of issue #1, so you won't need it to understand the story. In fact, the entire comic is extremely well-written. There is effective use of long silent passages to build reader suspense. The characters are well-defined, but not likable; this issue focuses on an amoral lawyer and her serial killer client. The art is passable, but not spectacular. Figures are drawn too stiffly and characters are not drawn with great consistency. The colour is very well-done and creates some spectacular effects with the supernatural characters. It should be noted that the story is definitely for MATURE READERS.

As the title suggests, this series is full of revelations, as characters learn about their true natures. Nothing is resolved this issue, but the synopsis that is included in the recap suggests that the series is building towards a war with Heaven and Hell. Definitely worth checking out. —Carson

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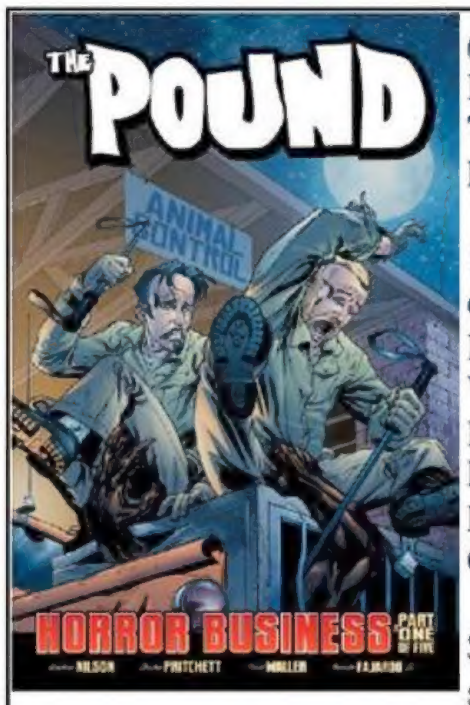
Like our reviews?
Tell the publishers you saw it in SP!



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IDW Comics

The Pound-Horror Busines Pt.1

130pg Graphic Novel, Full color. First printing, Sept., 2011. By Stephan Nilson, Writer; Karl Waller, Illustration; Rick Bonilla, Ink Assists; Romulo Fajardo Jr., Colorist; Charles Pritchett, Letterer; Ron Riley, Cover & Chapter Colors.

$19.95. Available at: https://shop.idwpublishing.com/the-pound.html

What do two unemployed municipal animal control specialists do when their city is infested with monsters? They open a facility. "The Pound," dedicated to the capture and rehabilitation of unregistered monsters. What they don't realize is that their community service is putting a serious kink in the original four monsters' plans for all-out Armageddon!

Review: Scott Allison is a father and husband living outside of Cleveland, OH, where he has just been laid off as an animal control officer. His partner, Howard Lynch, who is a bit off, decides to open his own animal control business with Scott.

On their first call, the two of them end up chasing a wild dog that has broken into a nearby high school. The two tranquilize the dog and place it in the back of the truck. Later, they discover that they no longer have a wild dog, but instead a tranquilized black man, Darnell (who is the son of the alpha werewolf). That's when Allison and Lynch realize something is up.

The two animal control officers are soon entangled in a world of monsters, werewolves, and packs, all seeking to dominate… well… Cleveland, and it's up to Allison and Lynch to save the day.

THE POUND is one of the cleverest takes on the werewolf genre in a long, long time! I am a huge fan of "buddy comics," and the chemistry between Lynch and Allison is priceless. Lynch steals the show and spends most of the time fighting werewolves with dog toys. He also takes photos of Darnell in wolf form licking himself.

Creators Stephan Nilson and Charles Pritchett have created an entertaining and timely story (ie. Allison dealing with unemployment). The comic has no problem taking shots at *Twilight*, and even gives an awesome nod to the forgotten classic, *Monster Squad*.

The comic had a *Mythbusters* meets *Billy the Exterminator* meets *Underworld* feel. THE POUND is further enhanced by the artwork of Karl Waller and Romulo Fajardo Jr, which really brings the comic to life. The lines are tight and the characters, to scale.\
THE POUND is a great story with great art and just great fun! Pick it up. —Don

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Nobody.sh

Timeliners—Thursday Afternoon

28pg Full Size comic, B+W w/color cover. First printing, 2005. By Bruce Hughes, Eric Shonborn, and Ryan Merrell.

Look for more recent work at www.bruceohughes.com

Review: Being a huge fan of time travel stories, this book caught my interest from the premise alone. I have, unfortunately, now read it, and I have the sad duty to relay to everyone else who loves time travel… that that's 20 minutes of my life I'll never get back. Let's see if I can unravel what went wrong in this book.

It's convoluted to a point where every couple of pages jumps forward or back a few minutes—until you have no clue the sequence things in which events should be happening—until the final scene, which does provide a little bit of perspective. The problem is, it seems like it would REALLY help to have read anything else these characters appeared in, because they are simply not people you can connect with or care about in this work. The inside back cover tries to explain a bit, but it doesn't really.

The artwork is no less sloppy in its presentation. There is little attention to body structure, and for some reason, everyone has little spots floating near their bodies. It's just not easy on the eyes and it makes pages hard to follow. I took an opportunity to look at the website and some of the newer comics that they've done, and the art style does seem to develop and clean up in more recent offerings. But here… It's just rough all around.

So, is this worth seeking out a copy? Probably not. But you might be more interested in more recent work, so take a look in that sense. —Ian

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Ray Tomczak

Wasted Potential—Globe Cover

1 folded sheet of paper (almost an 8pg Minicomic), B+W. First printing, 2009. By Ray Tomczak.

Publication probably not available. Look him up at:

www.wastedpotential.thewebcomic.com

Review: Ray's *Wasted Potential* comics are good. Both well-drawn and well-written, with good pacing and wit. I've always enjoyed his view of the world, and he's a good guy to boot. He was instrumental in the Small Press Syndicate for a while, back in the 90s. Why his talent has not taken hold and made him a more widely known cartoonist, I don't know. A read

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through his website shows that he put his strips on hiatus in January, 2011. So, not sure what he's up to right now; maybe he'll come post when I send him this review.

This "issue" of his strips is little more than a few examples of his continued work. It's not packaged as a publication at all, really; more of a flyer. Holding it, you wish he'd put a little more effort into it, as the strips stand together well and even stand the test of time; some date back to 2007. So, I don't know what else really to add to this review. Look him up and encourage him to do a TPB or something. Or just read the strips he's got online and enjoy the Wasted Potential. —Ian

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Von Allan Studio
Stargazer—Vol.1

123pg pdf, Full size comic/ Graphic novel, B+W w/ color cover. First printing, 2010. By Von Allan.

$14.95. Ordering at http://stargazer.vonallan.com/

Review: So what you have here is your basic *Alice in Wonderland*-type romp. What sets it apart is the wonderful back-story and characterizations that infuse this work with its own life, and the solid artwork which gives the fantasy world a realism that makes it ring just as true as our own world.

Immediately upon reading the first words of the story, you know it's all about the people. They are dealing with real life issues in real ways, as we are introduced to the mechanism that will take the three children/friends to the alien world they end up exploring. So, Von Allen has a firm grasp on what makes a good story and a great experience. He makes us care about the people.

The pacing of these 72 pages of story, is not fast. But it is even. It progresses naturally, and while you are getting the sense that the kids are not really in any danger and know that most likely, there will be an end to this—where the kids are reunited with the real world, and will be unable to tell anyone else what happened for fear of them not believing—that doesn't really matter. You want to know what is really going on—in this world. I was actually sad when the story stopped on page 80 of a 123-page book, because I wanted to read more. (hint to Von Allen: I'd love to review Volume 2!)

But once I got over the fact the story is "to be continued," I got to enjoy some GREAT extras in this well-packaged book. Character studies. Creative process explanations. Actual script. In conclusion, this is an all-ages story you can easily enjoy as an adult, share with your kids, and even, in a perfect world, see being made into a movie. It's that good. —Ian

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Walking Man Comics
Walking Man Comics Presents Special #71—Feb, 2010

8pg Minicomic, B+W. First printing, February, 2010. By Matt Levin.

$1.00. Seek at walkingmancomics@comcast.net

Review: What can you say about Matt Levin's work? It is completely a style all its own. He uses rubber stamps and lines to assemble pages… which present ideas in a lyrical singsongy way. And he's been at it for at least as long as I have, so yeah, that issue number is well-earned and it's not his only series that goes well past 50 issues. Matt's story in making comics is something I really think needs to be addressed in a meaningful historic way. No one else does what he does, so if you've never seen his minicomics, check one out. —Ian

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EXITORIAL

And that's a wrap for another great issue of SP! Magazine. Kinda light on the reviews this time, but as you have seen, we have added 3 new people to the crew and as we finish getting them oriented and used to entering reviews in our system, I think you'll start to see this place blossom with reviews. I personally did not get many done last month, as I am also working on an expansion of the Hall of Fame archives, adding about 5000 names of people and small press companies to the system. I'll probably have to try to balance my time a bit better as I am the only one who can really dig into the huge backlog of books I picked up at SPACE this past spring. Everyone else is taking up the slack of PDF review copies I'm getting sent (and keep em coming folks!)

Anyway, we're having a blast putting this thing together each month now...this is the biggest issue yet, and we feel like we're on the verge of hitting our stride and starting to reach some download landmarks, showing that we're definitely building readership. It is our collective goal to continue to dig deep, get to know today's publishers, remember yesterday's, and help everyone find new readers interested in—well, the diversity that is out there. See you next month!

HEY KIDS!!!!

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